

## Children's Service

# Coping with nausea and vomiting from chemotherapy – Young People's Guide



### What is this leaflet about?

Lots of people feel sick or vomit when they have chemotherapy. This leaflet is for young people and gives some ideas about how to make you feel a bit better when you are having chemo. There is a lot of information here, don't feel you need to read it all through at once. Dip in and out of the leaflet and see if there is anything here that helps you.

### Is it normal for me to feel like this when I'm having chemo?

Yes. Lots of people undergoing chemotherapy fear they'll be sick, or are sick. But new drugs have made these side effects far less common and less severe when they do happen. Sometimes the feeling of sickness happens even before the chemo starts. This is because you may expect that you will be sick, because of how you felt the last time you had chemo.

### What makes it worse and what helps?

Anxiety (such as the fear of being sick) can cause nausea to worsen. There are techniques that can help with anxiety and can generally help the feelings of sickness go away. These methods include distraction, using imagery, breathing techniques, and "progressive muscle relaxation" (tightening and relaxing the muscles in the body one by one). This leaflet briefly describes how to try these methods. Try each and see which works for you.



## Distraction

- Distract yourself when you can: chatting with people, putting on music, or watching a movie or TV show.
- Doing more “active” things which require concentration can be very helpful, such as playing video games.

## Imagery

Imagery is about imagining a place in your mind and it can be a useful way of distracting yourself from the sick feelings as it helps “take your mind off it” and is a good way to relax. The best way to get this to work is to imagine things as clearly as possible.

Try these things which may help:

1. Lie quietly and close your eyes.
2. Relax and think of a favourite/nice place (it doesn't have to be real, you can make somewhere up). Is it a beach? A jungle? Maybe a garden or a field?
3. Picture the image in your mind in as much detail as you can. What is in this place you're thinking about? Is anyone or anything else with you? Are there animals there? What colour is the sky/the ground/the sea? Are there trees? Buildings? (The idea is to make the image as clear as possible. Have a wander around your imagination)



Doing imagery tasks like this can help you to feel less sick. If it works, you can go back to the place that you enjoy imagining whenever you begin to feel unwell. The more you practice (and it helps to use the same image), the quicker the exercise will work in helping you to relax.



## Breathing

Breathing deeply and slowly can help get rid of the sick feeling.

Try this way of breathing which might help:

1. Put a hand on your abdomen (around your stomach) and one on your chest (but only if this feels comfortable).
2. Breathe in slowly and deeply (through your nose if you can) counting to two as you breathe in. The hand on your abdomen should move a bit, but the one on your chest shouldn't move very much.
3. Hold the breath for the count of two, then slowly breathe out through your mouth (if you can). Listen to the sound of your breathing; it should make a "whoosh" sound as you breathe out.
4. Wait two seconds and slowly breathe in again.
5. Concentrate while they breathe on the hand on your abdomen moving slightly, and the sound of your breath.
6. Keep doing this until you begin to feel better. Don't breathe too fast or you'll feel dizzy.



## Muscle Relaxation

Muscle relaxation has been found to make the feelings of being sick, and actually being sick much better during chemo.

What happens with “progressive muscle relaxation” is that you focus on one muscle group at a time, holding the muscles tight for 8 -10 seconds, and then letting the muscle relax.

This really helps people to relax and can also work as a way of distracting you from anxiety and nausea.

How to do it:

Lie on the bed, keep the room as quiet a room as possible. Follow these instructions, it may help to ask someone else to read them out to you (ask them to use a calm and quiet voice):

1. Start with your right hand. Make a fist. Hold for three counts...one...two...three... and relax your hand.
2. Bend your right arm and "show off your muscles. Wait for three counts.....and release.
3. Now your left hand. Make a fist. Hold it tight....one....two....three...release.
4. Focus on your left upper arm. Bend the arm and tighten the muscles. One....two...three...release.
5. Onto your head. Raise your eyebrows for three counts....and relax your face
6. Squeeze your eyes tight shut.....one...two...three....relax.
7. Next clench your teeth together and pull a face....one...two....three...relax.
8. Pull up your shoulders towards your ears...hold them there for three counts, then let them relax.
9. Take a nice deep breathe and try and put your should blades together at the same time...hold....two...three....then relax and breathe normally.
10. Now your right thigh. Tense your thigh up....hold for one...two....three, then release.
11. Tense up your muscle in your right calf hold for one...two...three....relax.
12. Next tense up your left thigh ....hold for three counts... then release.
13. Tense up your muscle in your left calf hold for one...two...three....relax.

14. Focus on your right foot. Point your toes towards your head and tense your foot up...one...two...three.
15. Now your right toes, point them down away from your and hold for one...two...three...and relax.
16. Now your left foot. Point your toes up towards you tense your foot as much as you can...one...two...three.
17. Finally your left toes, point them down and hold for one...two...three...and relax.

Okay: done

You should begin to feel more relaxed immediately. You can try doing this several times a day.

This document is also available in other languages, large print and audio format upon request – 01223 216032 or [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

本文件也可應要求，製作成其他語文或特大字體版本，也可製作成錄音帶。

#### Cantonese

આ દસ્તાવેજ વિનંતી કરવાથી બીજી ભાષાઓ, મોટા છાપેલા અક્ષરો અથવા ઓડિઓ રચનામાં પણ મળી રહેશે.

#### Gujarati

A richiesta questo documento è anche disponibile in altre lingue, a caratteri grandi e in formato audio.

#### Italian

ئەم بەلگەيە ھەر ھەروەھا بە زمانەکانی کە، بە چاپی درشت و بە شریتی تەسجیل دەس دەکەوێت

#### Kurdish

درخواست پر یہ دستاویز دیگر زبانوں میں، بڑے حروف کی چھپائی اور سننے والے ذرائع پر بھی میسر ہے۔

#### Urdu

### Document History

Authors	Katie Newns, Trainee Clinical Psychologist
Department	Children's Services, Box 51 Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 2QQ <a href="http://www.addenbrookes.org.uk">www.addenbrookes.org.uk</a>
Contact number	01223 216485
Published	August 2005
Review date	August 2007
File name	Coping_with_nausea&vomiting.doc
Version number	1
Ref	739