

Nausea and Vomiting Medications

What is happening

Nausea and vomiting are very common in serious illness. They can make it difficult to:

- Eat
- Drink
- Stay comfortable

If not treated, nausea can lead to **dehydration and weakness**.

Why these medications are used

Medications help to:

- Reduce the feeling of nausea
- Prevent or stop vomiting
- Improve comfort and ability to take fluids

Managing nausea early is important to maintain hydration and overall comfort.

What you can do

- Encourage **small amounts of fluids frequently**
- Use fluids with electrolytes (such as sports drinks or oral rehydration solutions), not just water
- Give medications as directed rather than waiting until symptoms are severe

Common medications

- Reglan (metoclopramide)
- Zofran (ondansetron)
- Haldol (haloperidol)
- Zyprexa (olanzapine)
- Antacids (Tums, Pepcid/famotidine, Prilosec/omeprazole)

These medications work in different ways:

- Some act on the **stomach**
- Others act on the **brain's nausea centers**
- Some reduce **stomach acid**

How to give these medications

- Most are taken **by mouth**
- They may be given:
 - **As needed** when nausea starts
 - Or **on a regular schedule** (e.g., every 4–6 hours) if nausea is frequent
- If the patient cannot swallow pills:
 - Some medications dissolve under the tongue (**sublingual**)
 - Ask your hospice team about these options

When it should work

- Many medications begin working within **about 30 minutes**
- Dissolving (sublingual) forms may work **more quickly**

Possible side effects

Side effects depend on the medication but may include:

- **Drowsiness or fatigue**
- **Confusion**
- **Headache**
- **Constipation or diarrhea**
- **Dry mouth**

Antacids generally have **few significant side effects**

When to call hospice

- Nausea or vomiting is **not improving with medication**
- The patient **cannot keep medications or fluids down**
- Signs of dehydration:
 - Very little urine
 - Dry mouth
 - Increased weakness
- Increasing confusion or excessive sleepiness
- Any concern about which medication to give or when