

PERI ANESTHESIA CARE DEPARTMENT- SURGICAL SERVICES

Preventing **NAUSEA and VOMITING** AFTER SURGERY

Discharge Instructions: After Your Surgery

What are **nausea** and **vomiting**?

Nausea feels like you might throw up. **Vomiting** is when you actually throw up. These 2 things can happen together. But sometimes, people feel nauseous without throwing up.

Some people get **nausea** and **vomit** after having surgery. This is called "postoperative" **nausea** and **vomiting**. Although it is usually not serious, it can still be unpleasant. But there are ways to help prevent and treat it.

What causes **nausea** and **vomiting** after surgery?

The most common cause is general anesthesia. "**Anesthesia**" means different types of medicine people get before surgery or another procedure. General anesthesia makes you unconscious, so you can't feel, see, or hear anything during surgery.

Not everyone who gets general anesthesia has **nausea** or **vomiting** after surgery. But some people do. You are more likely to have it if you:

- Had **nausea** or **vomiting** before surgery
- Are female
- Are younger than 50 years old
- Do not smoke
- Had **nausea** and **vomiting** after surgery in the past
- Had motion sickness in the past
- Get certain types of anesthesia medicines
- Get certain pain medicines after surgery

Nausea and **vomiting** are also more likely after certain types of surgery.

Can **nausea** and **vomiting** after surgery lead to problems?

Sometimes. It usually goes away on its own or with treatment. But in some cases, it can lead to problems, such as:

- Your cut (incision) from surgery opening up again
- Dehydration, which is when your body loses too much water

Taking medicines to prevent or treat **nausea** and **vomiting** can help you avoid these problems.

Can nausea and vomiting be prevented?

There are things doctors can do to help lower your risk of nausea and vomiting after surgery. These might include:

- Using "regional anesthesia" – This type of anesthesia blocks pain in 1 area of your body, such as an arm, a leg, or the lower half of your body. Some procedures can be done this way instead of making you unconscious with general anesthesia. People who get regional anesthesia are less likely to have nausea and vomiting than people who get general anesthesia. Regional anesthesia can also be used to help prevent pain after surgery. This way, you are less likely to need medicines that can cause nausea and vomiting.
- Avoiding certain pain medicines – People who get "opioid" pain medicines after surgery are more likely to have nausea and vomiting. Your doctor can give you other medicines before, during, and after surgery to help with pain.
- Giving you medicines to help prevent nausea and vomiting – There are many different medicines that can help prevent these problems. They are called "antiemetics." Most are given through an IV (a thin tube that goes into a vein) or by mouth. Or you might get medicine through a patch that goes on your skin. Your doctor can give you these medicines before, during, or after surgery.
- Acupuncture or acupressure – Acupuncture involves having tiny needles inserted into your body. Acupressure involves pressing on specific parts of the body to relieve pain and other problems. Some people find that acupuncture or acupressure on the inside of the wrist helps with nausea and vomiting.

Before surgery, your doctor will talk to you about your risks and preferences. You will decide together whether to do any of the above things to try to prevent nausea and vomiting.

How are nausea and vomiting treated?

Doctors can treat it with medicine. Many of the medicines used for this are the same as the ones used to prevent nausea and vomiting. But there are many medicines in this group. Your doctor can give you different medicines if the ones you got before didn't work or have worn off.

How long do nausea and vomit after surgery last?

It depends. Most people feel better within 24 hours.

Reference (s): Lippincott Solutions (Walters Kluwer, 2025)
