

Nausea: Where Does it Come From?

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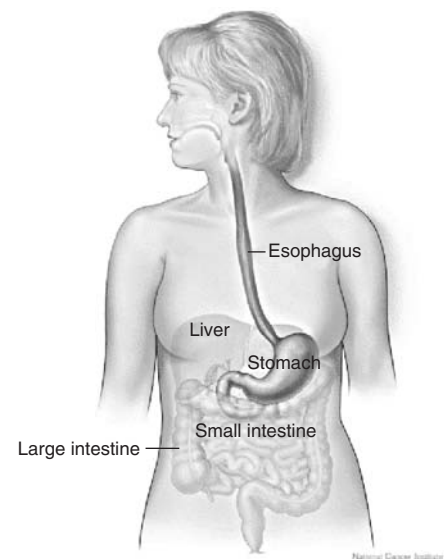
Nausea can be an awful experience, sometimes worse than pain. While nausea is often a sensation of discomfort in the stomach, it usually is caused by conditions elsewhere in the body. Unfortunately, there is no single approach to treating nausea and physicians may need to try different medications before finding one that works. The purpose of this page is to shed light on the causes and treatments of nausea for those patients and families struggling with this symptom.

1. The inner ear triggers nausea when signals about our balance clash with what we see.

- Seasickness or motion-sickness
- Viral infection or tumor near the inner ear
- Medications for this type of nausea block the receptors that sense dizziness

2. Nerves from the stomach, intestines and abdominal organs send signals that trigger nausea.

- Irritants such as blood and some types of food
- Constipation or blockage in the intestines
- Tumors or inflammation that cause swelling of organs such as the liver
- Medications for this type of nausea improve the mobility of the stomach and intestines, either by stimulating the muscles or by decreasing inflammation
- A nasogastric tube, which is inserted through the nose and enters the stomach, may provide additional relief when gas is unable to move through the intestines



3. The part of the brain that senses foreign substances in the blood can trigger nausea.

- Toxins from tumors or infections that enter the bloodstream
- Medications, byproducts from the breakdown of medications, and chemotherapy that are absorbed by the digestive tract
- Medications for this type of nausea block the receptors in the brain that sense chemicals

4. Memory and the senses, such as smell, can trigger nausea.

- The anticipation of an uncomfortable experience such as undergoing chemotherapy
- Unpleasant odors or sights
- Medications for this type of nausea are similar to those for anxiety

Because nausea can be treated in a variety of ways, there is no single “cocktail” of medications that can be used for every patient. In addition, it is difficult to determine which of the above causes plays the strongest role in a given patient. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that physicians may need to offer trials of different medications before finding ones that are effective.

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