

Managing Nausea During Chemotherapy

People with cancer who received cannabis extract reported fewer daily vomiting episodes and had higher quality-of-life scores.

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Nausea and vomiting are common symptoms of cancer medications and radiation therapy that can lead to inadequate nutrition, interfere with daily activities and cause patients to stop treatment prematurely.

Researchers evaluated 1,300 women undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer. They received standard anti-nausea medications during their first chemo cycle, but 310 nonetheless experienced at least moderate nausea and were randomly assigned to add olanzapine (Zyprexa) or prochlorperazine (Compazine)—two drugs used to treat schizophrenia—or a placebo during their next chemo cycle.

Both drugs significantly reduced nausea compared with the placebo, but olanzapine was more effective for people with severe nausea. Women who received olanzapine also reported a significant improvement in their overall quality of life.

“[Olanzapine] could ultimately make the chemotherapy experience more tolerable and manageable,” says lead study author Luke Peppone, PhD, of the University of Rochester Medical Center.

In another study, researchers evaluated an oral cannabis extract for people who experienced nausea or vomiting during chemo despite standard anti-nausea meds. Eligible participants were randomized to add capsules containing tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD) or placebo capsules.

Patients who received the THC/CBD capsules were three times more likely to experience a complete response, meaning no vomiting or retching and no use of rescue medications (24%

versus 8%, respectively). Those who received the cannabis extract also reported fewer daily vomiting episodes and had higher quality-of-life scores.

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