

# Choosing Wisely<sup>®</sup>

*An initiative of the ABIM Foundation*



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AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CLINICAL ONCOLOGY

## Medicines to treat cancer

For nausea, for advanced-breast cancer, and for targeted therapy

If you have cancer, you and your doctor will want to do everything possible to make your treatment successful and to keep you comfortable.

This report looks at three types of medicines:

- Drugs to treat nausea during chemotherapy
- Two or more chemotherapy drugs for breast cancer that has spread
- Drugs that target certain kinds of cancer cells

These treatments can be helpful. But they can also cause harm. Some are very expensive. It is important to make the right choice for your situation.

### Drugs to treat nausea during chemotherapy

Chemotherapy often causes nausea and vomiting. To ease these effects, your doctor may prescribe an anti-nausea drug. Some of these drugs are new, powerful and effective.



***Choosing an anti-nausea drug:*** Your doctor should choose an anti-nausea drug based on the kind of chemotherapy you receive.

***You may need a more powerful anti-nausea drug if:***

- The first drug your doctor prescribes doesn't ease your symptoms.
- Your treatment has a high risk of causing nausea and vomiting.

***If you have a low risk of nausea:*** You might not need the strongest anti-nausea drug. A less powerful, and less expensive, drug may work well for you.

- Newer drugs can cost \$200–\$250 a dose.
- Older drugs can cost under \$1 a dose.
- Costs will depend on where you live, your insurance, and whether you have a co-pay.

### **Taking more than one chemotherapy drug for breast cancer that has spread**

When cancer has spread beyond the breasts and underarm lymph nodes, it's considered advanced cancer. That means the cancer can't be cured, but it can be treated.

Chemotherapy can help you live longer. In some cases, more than one chemotherapy drug may be used at the same time. But this isn't the best thing for everyone.

- Patients who react well to chemotherapy do just as well taking only one drug.
- Taking one drug at a time may reduce side effects.

***When you may need to take more than one chemotherapy drug:*** In some cases, a second drug may help. For example, if a tumor is pressing on your spine, it could cause pain or affect your ability to walk. In that case, taking a second drug may help shrink the tumor faster. This could reduce your pain and prevent other problems.

### **Targeted therapy**

Targeted therapies are a kind of chemotherapy.

- They target certain kinds of genes or proteins in cancer cells.
- They aim to stop the growth of these cancer cells without damaging healthy cells.

In some cases, targeted therapy can keep cancer from coming back. But the therapy doesn't work if you don't have the type of gene or protein it targets.

This report is for you to use when talking with your healthcare provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this report is at your own risk.

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