# SOMANZ

SOCIETY OF OBSTETRIC MEDICINE OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

# The SOMANZ

Position Statement on the Management of Nausea and Vomiting in Pregnancy and Hyperemesis Gravidarum

## Updated October 2023

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These are the updated recommendations of a multidisciplinary working party convened by the Society of Obstetric Medicine of Australia and New Zealand. They reflect current medical literature and the clinical experience of members of the working party. The accompanying Executive Summary and Treatment Algorithms (1 and 2) summarise the key recommendations. These should be read in conjunction with this complete guideline which also includes a Patient Information Leaflet and a template for an Individual Patient Management Plan.

The original version of this document was published online in 2019 and an Executive Summary was published in 2020 Lowe, Armstrong (1). There are no substantive changes in the recommendations, apart from a revised definition of hyperemesis gravidarum. Additional research and data regarding assessment and management published between 2019 and 2023 has been reviewed and assessed.

The authors declare they have no conflicts of interest.

**The original 2019 Position Statement was endorsed by the following organisations:**

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (RANZCOG)
Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP)
Royal Australasian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)
Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM)

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# Introduction

The approach to the management of nausea and vomiting in pregnancy (NVP) and hyperemesis gravidarum (HG) in the current era is strongly reminiscent of the cultural attitudes towards the management of pain in labour prior to the introduction of epidural anaesthesia in the 1970s. Both NVP and HG place a significant burden on the woman and her family as well as having significant cost implications included drug treatments, hospitalisations as well as time lost from work and caregiver time (2).

Women and their families have been appropriately concerned about medication use in early pregnancy and doctors have been reticent to offer women therapy, being mindful of the impact of the thalidomide tragedy of the 1950-60s. Women have been expected to tolerate significant symptoms both physical and psychological because NVP is a normal and expected part of pregnancy. In a Norwegian study, focus groups indicated that women felt their distress due to NVP was trivialized by their doctors whilst the doctors appeared uncertain with respect to appropriate medical treatment of NVP (3). Compounding this problem, the women themselves were sceptical towards the use of medicines while pregnant, and avoidance was sought despite being ill.

Just as society adjusted to the medical advances that have allowed women to manage pain in labour, it is only appropriate that we change our attitudes through research, education and evidence-based guidance to ensure women have access to appropriate, safe and timely management for NVP and HG.

# Methods

Evidence was sought from MEDLINE, EMBASE and PUBMED searches and based on an extensive review of this literature, a fully referenced guideline was written. The quality of evidence was evaluated and the recommendations made according to NHMRC principles and described as per Table 1 (4). Where there was insufficient evidence, the expert opinion of the guideline group was sought, and agreement reached by majority opinion. The literature review was updated by the same method in August 2022.

The recommendation terms include the terms "should" or "must" (where benefits of the recommendation exceed the harms), "consider" (where the quality of evidence was limited or the available studies demonstrated little clear advantage of one approach over another, or the balance of benefits to harm was unclear) and "should not" or "do not" or "avoid" (where there is either a lack of appropriate evidence, or the harms outweigh the benefits).

The authors were selected by the Council of the Society of the Obstetric Medicine Group of Australia and New Zealand and represent a diverse group of physicians, obstetricians, and a clinical pharmacist with expertise in these conditions. The Guideline was also reviewed by midwives, general practitioners, and other clinicians as well as consumers with an interest in NVP and HG. This included women with current or previous NVP or HG.

From this, the critical recommendations were derived along with a series of potentially auditable outcomes to create the accompanying Executive Summary. These were then summarised and published as a SOMANZ Position Paper in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology (1).

| RECOMMENDATION | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| Evidence based (EBR) | Where sufficient evidence was available |
| Consensus recommendations (CBR) | Where there was insufficient evidence, the expert guideline development group made clinical consensus recommendations |
| Clinical practice points (CPP) | Important implementation and other issues (such as safety, side effects or risks) arose from discussion of evidence based or clinical consensus recommendations |
| LEVELS OF EVIDENCE | DESCRIPTION |
| I | A systematic review of Level II studies |
| II | A randomised controlled trial |
| III | Any non-randomised study(ies) including comparative study with concurrent controls, cohort, case-control, historical controls |
| IV | Case series |

**Table 1:** Definition of recommendations and simplified levels of evidence (4)

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **5HT** | Five hydroxy tryptamine receptor inhibitors |
| **aOR** | Adjusted odds ratio |
| **BD** | Two times a day |
| **CI** | 95% Confidence interval: [ ] |
| **CNS** | Central nervous system |
| **CVC** | Central venous catheter |
| **CYP** | Cytochrome P450 |
| **EN** | Enteral nutrition |
| **EUC** | Electrolytes, urea, creatinine |
| **FBC** | Full blood count |
| **GER** | Gastroesophageal reflux |
| **GHT** | Gestational hyperthyroxinemia/Gestational hyperthyroidism |
| **GP** | General practitioner |
| **HCG** | Human Chorionic Gonadotrophin |
| **HG** | Hyperemesis gravidarum |
| **H. Pylori** | Helicobacter Pylori |
| **hypoK** | Hypokalemia |
| **hypoMg** | Hypomagnesemia |
| **IM** | Intramuscular |
| **IQR** | Interquartile range |
| **IV** | Intravenous |
| **LFT** | Liver function tests |
| **M** | Muscarinic |
| **mcg** | Microgram |
| **NP** | Nausea in pregnancy without vomiting |
| **NV** | Nausea and vomiting |
| **NVP** | Nausea and vomiting in pregnancy |
| **OD/BD/TDS/QID** | Once /twice/three times/four times: per day |
| **OR** | Odds ratio |
| **PICC** | Peripherally inserted central catheter |
| **PO** | Oral |
| **PUQE-24** | Pregnancy-Unique Quantification of Emesis and Nausea scored over 24 hours |
| **QID** | Four times a day |
| **RCT** | Randomised controlled trial |
| **RR** | Relative risk |
| **SC** | Subcutaneous |
| **SGA** | Small for gestational age |
| **TDS** | Three times a day |
| **TFT** | Thyroid function tests |
| **TPN** | Total Parenteral Nutrition |
| **TPOAb/TRAb/TgAb** | Thyroid peroxidase/Thyroid receptor/Thyroglobulin: Antibody |
| **TSH** | Thyroid stimulating hormone |

# What are the definitions of NVP and HG?

NVP is defined as symptoms of nausea, vomiting and/or dry retching commencing in the first trimester without another cause. All women should be asked about NVP at each visit between 4 and 16 weeks.

The most commonly cited criteria for diagnosis of HG include persistent vomiting with weight loss not related to other causes along with an objective measure of acute starvation such as carbohydrate depletion, electrolyte abnormalities and/or acid-base disturbance. The ICD-10 criteria are similar but specify onset before 22 weeks of gestation (5). The degree of weight loss required to meet the criteria for HG is often defined as at least 5% of pre-pregnancy weight (6, 7). Ketonuria is often cited as a measure of dehydration or starvation in HG, however, in a systematic review and meta-analysis, ketonuria was not found to be reliably associated with either the diagnosis or severity of HG (8).

A recently developed International consensus definition for hyperemesis gravidarum, the Windsor definition, requires all of the following criteria be met (9):

1. Symptoms starting in early pregnancy <16 weeks gestation
2. Severe nausea and/or vomiting
3. Inability to eat and/or drink normally
4. Strongly limiting daily activities

Signs of dehydration were deemed contributory but not mandatory.

The diagnosis of HG is not based on the PUQE-24 (see below) or any other scoring system. Although there may be a continuum between NVP and HG, it is critical to distinguish HG from NVP as the management and potential maternal and fetal complications differ.

Symptom scores can be used to assess NVP severity, although any scoring system will not necessarily reflect an individuals' total symptom burden. Scoring systems should not replace a holistic enquiry regarding ability to eat and drink, weight and hydration status, physical and mental functioning, and overall impact of NVP. Several scoring systems exist for quantitating nausea and vomiting including the Rhodes Score, originally designed for chemotherapy patients (10). The most used in pregnancy is the Motherisk **P**regnancy-**U**nique **Q**uantification of **E**mesis and Nausea (PUQE) scoring index (Table 2) which has been validated and proven simpler and equally reliable as the Rhodes score (11).

| 1. In the last 24 hours, for how long have you felt nauseated or sick to your stomach? | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not at all (1) | 1 hour or less (2) | 2-3 hours (3) | 4 to 6 hours (4) | More than 6 hours (5) |
| **2. In the last 24 hours, have you vomited or thrown up?** | | | | |
| I did not throw up (1) | 1 to 2 (2) | 3 to 4 (3) | 5 to 6 (4) | 7 or more times (5) |
| **3. In the last 24 hours, how many times have you had retching or dry heaves without throwing up?** | | | | |
| None (1) | 1 to 2 (2) | 3 to 4 (3) | 5 to 6 (4) | 7 or more times (5) |

**Table 2:** Motherisk PUQE-24 scoring system
Total score: mild ≤6; moderate 7 to 12; severe ≥13 (Scores in brackets)

The PUQE system assesses the severity of nausea and vomiting with three questions relating to duration of nausea, and frequency of vomiting and dry retching symptoms. The PUQE-24 scored over 24 hours (Table 2), has more recently been established to correlate closely with the woman's own estimate of overall physical and mental well-being (P < 0.001) as well as important practical indicators of severity such as rates of hospitalization and emergency room visits (12). The addition of a fourth question to the PUQE-24 score:

"On a scale of 0-10, how would you rate your wellbeing? 0 (worst possible) 10 (the best you felt before pregnancy)" has been shown to correlate with hydration status but is not routinely included in severity scoring (12). In a Finnish study of women hospitalised with NVP, the PUQE-12 hour score, both as categorised and as continuous scores, reflected severity on admission in terms of physical and mental quality of life score and risk of readmission. In addition, the decrease in PUQE-12 score was associated with improved physical quality of life score (13). Similar results were obtained in a Norwegian study using the PUQE-24 (14). In a Japanese population, the PUQE-24 was shown to be tightly correlated with an NVP-Quality of life score (r=0.82)(15) .

An alternate scoring system, the HyperEmesis Level Prediction (HELP) Score has been proposed to better reflect HG severity (16). It measures 12 parameters including number of voids per day, ability to function, mood, oral intake, ability to tolerate oral medications, weight loss and the change in symptoms over a week. In this validation study of 445 women responding to an online survey through the Hyperemesis Research Foundation, a severe HELP score (≥33/60) was a better predictor than a severe PUQE score (≥13/15), of the need for treatment in the emergency room (28.2% versus 10.1%) and hospitalisation (27.4% versus 9.8%).

In the NOURISH study, a prospective study of women between 6 and 11 weeks pregnant, who completed a self-report online questionnaire, both the PUQE-24 and HELP score were assessed (17). There was close agreement in the severity ratings of the two scoring systems (mild/moderate/severe PUQE-24 30.8/57.8/11.4% , HELP 28.3/57.2/14.5%). In this study, 29.5% of women met the Windsor criteria for HG.

In view of these findings, both the PUQE-24 and HELP score are suitable for assessment and monitoring of women with NVP and HG. However, the utility of the longer and more complex HELP tool has been questioned and further studies are awaited (13).

## SOMANZ definitions of NVP and HG:

**Nausea and vomiting of pregnancy:**

Nausea, vomiting and/or dry retching caused by pregnancy, with symptoms commencing in the first trimester without an alternate diagnosis.

Severity may be quantitated using the PUQE-24 or HELP Score (12, 16) [LOE-I].

1. Mild: PUQE-24 = 4-6 or HELP ≤19
2. Moderate: PUQE-24 = 7-12 or HELP 20-32
3. Severe: PUQE-24 ≥ 13 or HELP 33-60

The inability to eat and drink, significant weight loss and/or significant limitation of activity, irrespective of the PUQE-24 or HELP score, should also be considered as a measure of severity.

## Hyperemesis Gravidarum: as per the Windsor definition (9)

1. Symptoms starting in early pregnancy <16 weeks gestation
2. Severe nausea and/or vomiting (PUQE-24 ≥ 13 or HELP 33-60)
3. Inability to eat and/or drink normally
4. Strongly limiting daily activities

By definition, this condition is considered severe.

Any validated scoring system can be used to guide initial treatment, but subsequent management decisions should be based on the response to treatment as per the principles of management discussed below.

## Audit opportunity

- Proportion of women with symptoms of NVP recorded in the antenatal record
- If NVP present, PUQE-24 score (or HELP score) and repetition at each visit whilst symptoms persist
- Incidence of HG per 1000 deliveries at each institution

# What is the incidence and natural history of NVP and HG?

Nausea and vomiting are common symptoms of pregnancy with prevalence varying in different parts of the world. A recent meta-analyses of the global prevalence estimated a risk of any NVP of 69% [95% Confidence Interval 67-72%] (18). The average rate of nausea alone was 33% [22-44%] with the majority of women rating their nausea as moderate to severe. In a recent Australian observational study 72% of women reported NVP of which 42% had mild symptoms, 55% moderate and 1% severe (19). Retching has been recognised as a significant and distinct symptom with independent impact on well-being (20).

The incidence of hyperemesis gravidarum (HG) is much lower than NVP at 1.1% [0.8-1.3%], depending on the definitions used (18). There were geographical differences with most high-income countries having similar rates. Much higher rates were seen in East Asia and low rates in India and Netherlands (21). Even within a country, ethnicity seems to influence the prevalence, with Pacific Islanders in New Zealand having a significantly increased incidence of HG compared with controls (22).

Both NVP and HG typically have their onset between the 4th and the 10th week of gestation, with the majority experiencing resolution by 20 weeks gestation. In the global meta-analysis, 24% [13-34%] of women described NVP even in late pregnancy and in approximately 10% of HG patients, symptoms persisted throughout pregnancy (18, 23). In another prospective recent study, only 50% of women reported relief of their symptoms by 14 weeks' gestation although 90% had relief by week twenty two (24).
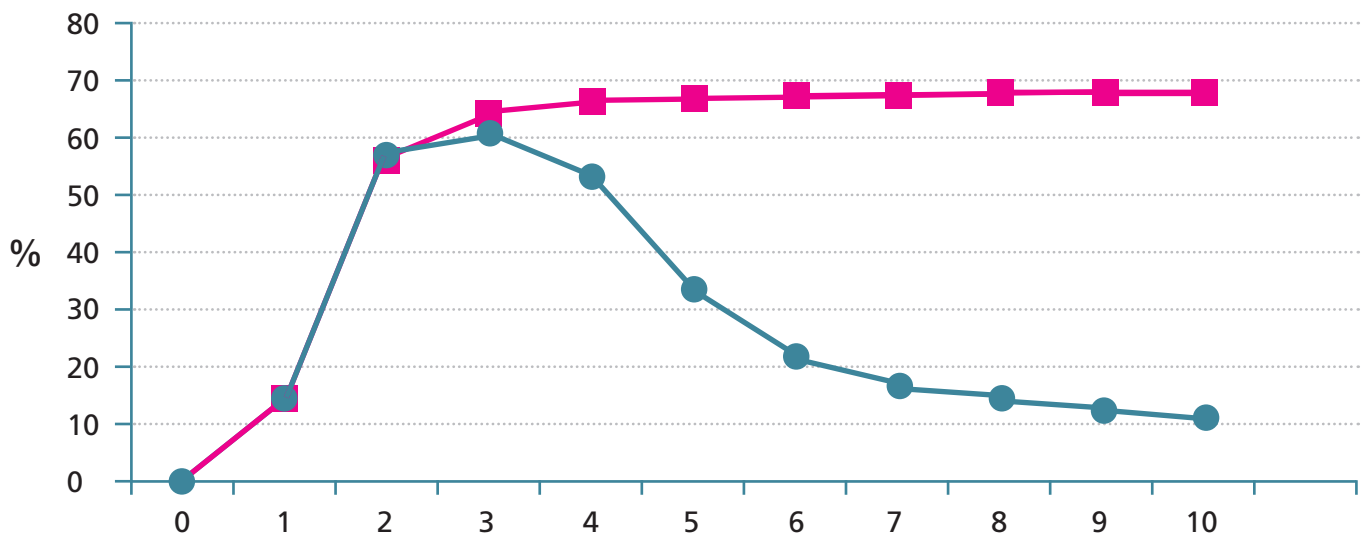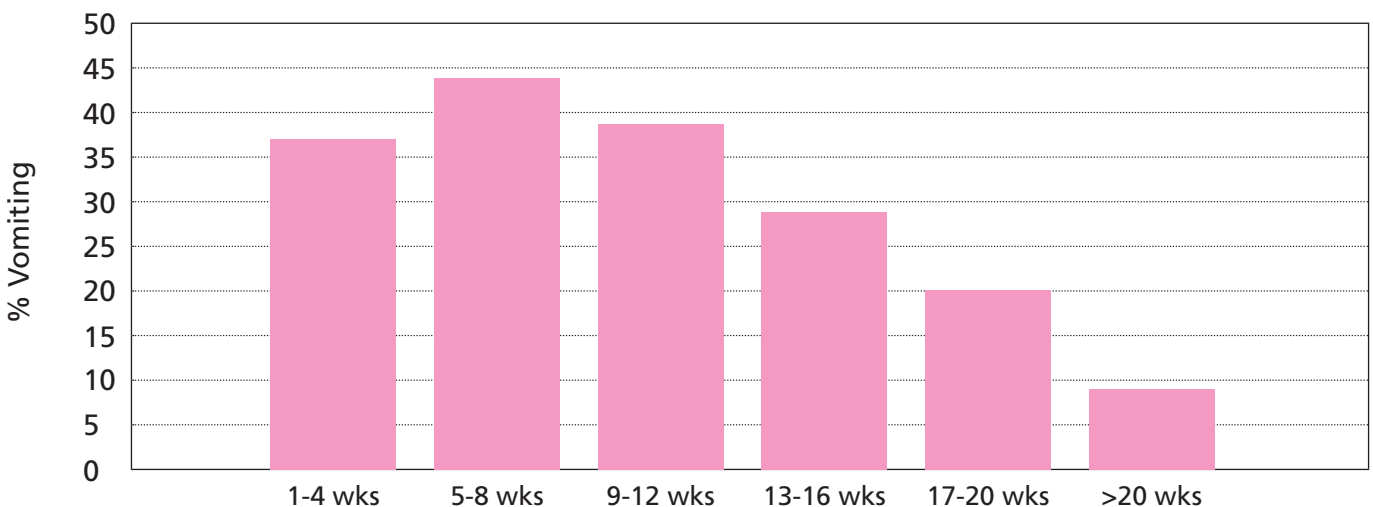


**Figure 1:** Incidence and prevalence of NVP (25)



**Figure 2:** Incidence of vomiting by gestation (26)

# What is the cause of NVP and HG?

The etiology of NVP and HG remains unclear but is likely to be multifactorial as discussed in recent reviews (27). The role of human Chorionic Gonadotrophin (hCG) has been discredited with increased understanding of other potential mediators (27,28)

In a meta-analysis, Helicobacter pylori (H. Pylori) infection was associated with an increased likelihood of HG during pregnancy, with a pooled OR of 1.3 (1.2-1.5 p < .001) although the literature in this area does show mixed results, almost certainly reflecting differing background prevalence in the populations studied (28, 29). H. Pylori infection detected by endoscopic biopsy was common in pregnant women, both with (95%) and without (50%) HG (30). Other associations including deficiency of trace elements, excess thyroid hormones, gravidity, multiple pregnancy, fetal female sex (87.7% v 86.1%) , psychiatric and dietary factors have all been suggested as part of the etiology but the methodology to support these hypotheses has been criticised (31). In one study, maternal smoking and having the support of three or more persons were protective for NVP (32).

Several lines of evidence support a genetic predisposition to NVP and HG. A multinational NVP Genetics Consortium has been created (including Australian participants) to add knowledge to the characterization of the genetic as well as environmental risk factors for HG and NVP (33). The Consortium has already published data suggesting heritability estimates of 73% [57–84%] for occurrence, 51% [36–63%] for duration and 53% [38–65%] for severity of NVP (34). In this study, the genetic correlation between duration and severity was almost perfect. In women with HG or severe NVP, several studies have suggested a higher incidence amongst first degree relatives (35-37). The recurrence risk in subsequent pregnancies is also suggestive of a genetic etiology.

In a recent study, an association has been demonstrated with variants in the ryanodine receptor (RyR2) gene which encodes an intracellular calcium release channel involved in vomiting and cyclic-vomiting syndrome. It is also a thyroid hormone target gene which is consistent with the association of thyroid dysfunction and HG (38). Propranolol blocks RyR2 phosphorylation and lowers its expression and has been used with significant success (92% effective) to treat cyclic vomiting syndrome in children (39).

A Genome Wide Association Scan has identified several genes in women with a history of HG which appear to be encode proteins of potential interest (40). This has been supported by subsequent Whole Exome-wide Sequencing which has demonstrated a mis-sense variant within the GDF15 gene associated with HG, and, equally importantly, failed to identify any variants in the hCG gene (41). GDF15 is produced by trophoblast cells and has been shown to be a regulator of physiological body weight and appetite via central mechanisms as well as being significant mediators of cancer anorexia and cachexia. Studies have demonstrated significantly increased levels of GDF15 and IGFBP7 at 12 weeks' gestation in women with HG, compared with women with NVP or no NVP. By 24 weeks, when symptoms had largely resolved, the levels were similar (42). This hypothesis requires further research although the prospect of testing for a marker protein for HG and having specific treatment targets is of significant interest.

Studies examining demographic factors such as work status, income and education associated with the presence and severity of nausea and vomiting, have produced inconsistent results (24-26, 43). Using a database search strategy of more than 8 million pregnancies, women admitted to hospital with HG were younger, of lower socioeconomic status, were more likely to be of Asian or Black ethnicity, were more likely to be carrying a female fetus and were more likely to be having a multiple pregnancy (44).

# What investigations are required for women with NVP?

Patients with mild-moderate nausea and vomiting of pregnancy (PUQE-24 ≤12), where symptoms are not suspicious for HG or another diagnosis, do not need investigation (45) [LOE-III]. History and physical examination should be directed towards identification of alternate diagnoses. Physical examination should include assessment of temperature, weight and assessment of percentage weight loss, palpation of the abdomen for abdominal tenderness and signs of peritonism, and an assessment for neck stiffness and signs of raised intracranial pressure if the history is suggestive of a central nervous system cause for the symptoms. Signs to support a diagnosis of dehydration include decreased skin turgor, dry mucous membranes, decreased urine output, concentrated urine, and postural drop in blood pressure. Psychosocial screening with a validated pregnancy screening tool should be part of the assessment of women with significant NVP or HG. Screening should be repeated as necessary with appropriate referrals made.

Measurement of beta Human Chorionic Gonadotrophin (HCG) is of no practical value for the diagnosis or management of HG. Tests to exclude alternate diagnoses should be performed where indicated [CPP].

## Investigations

| Indication | Investigation | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| **Severe NVP or HG** **i.e. PUQE score ≥13** | • Sodium, potassium, chloride, bicarbonate, magnesium, urea, creatinine, calcium, phosphate [EBR]<br>• Bilirubin, Alanine Transaminase (ALT), Aspartate Aminotransferase (AST), Albumin [CBR]<br>• Obstetric ultrasound to exclude multi-fetal or gestational trophoblastic disease [CBR] | Repeat daily if requiring ongoing IV fluids and inadequate oral intake or significant underlying conditions e.g. Type 1 diabetes, [EBR] |
| **Symptoms or signs of thyrotoxicosis** | Thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) [CBR] | TSH <0.25 mIU/L is suggestive of thyrotoxicosis |
| **Fever or symptoms of urinary tract infection** | Midstream urine microscopy and culture, white cell count [EBR] | White cell count is raised in pregnancy; up to $13.6 \times 10^9$/l in first trimester and $14.8 \times 10^9$/l in second trimester is normal )46) |

### Electrolytes and renal function:

Women with HG frequently have hyponatremia, hypokalemia, hypochloremia, hypomagnesaemia, and low serum urea with a metabolic hypochloremic alkalosis. If severe, a metabolic acidaemia may develop (6, 47, 48). An elevation in serum creatinine (>70umol/L) will suggest significant dehydration. Rarely, starvation ketoacidosis may occur resulting in significant metabolic derangement.

• For patients not requiring admission to hospital or treatment with IV fluids, electrolytes should be remeasured only if their condition deteriorates.

• For women requiring repeated IV fluids or admission to hospital, electrolytes should be measured daily or less frequently if stable after commencement of therapy.

• More frequent monitoring of electrolytes (at least daily) is required for women with diabetes or other significant underlying conditions.

### Liver function tests:

• Liver enzymes are elevated in 15-50% of patients with hyperemesis but are generally less than four times the upper limit of normal (49, 50).

• Liver dysfunction most commonly includes mild-moderate rises in transaminase levels (>2-3x local reference range for pregnancy), however, elevated bilirubin can also be seen although it is less common (50).

• Liver dysfunction typically resolves rapidly with improvement in HG symptoms (51).

• Further investigation should be considered if liver enzyme dysfunction is greater than 4 times the upper limit of normal for pregnancy.

### Thyroid Function tests:
See "How to manage gestational hyperthyroxinemia (below)

• Women with NVP who do not meet diagnostic criteria for HG do not require TFT measurement.

• TSH should be measured in women with HG or NVP refractory to treatment or in those with milder symptoms who have signs and/or symptoms of thyrotoxicosis.

### Obstetric ultrasound

Should be performed to assess for multiple gestation and gestational trophoblastic disease if not done already (52).

### Tests to exclude alternate diagnoses where indicated

In the patient who has atypical symptoms, signs or relevant history, further investigations may be required. The differential diagnosis for nausea and vomiting in pregnancy is varied and includes any disorder that can cause these symptoms (see Textbox)). Symptoms such as abdominal pain, fever, headache, and neck stiffness are not features of NVP or HG and suggest an alternate diagnosis. In addition the vomitus of nausea and vomiting of pregnancy is usually non-bilious and non-bloody, although hematemesis may occur in the context of Mallory-Weiss tears (53). In women with refractory HG, consider investigation for *H. Pylori* with fecal antigen testing.

# Differential Diagnosis of NVP in Pregnancy

[more common causes in bold]

## Gastrointestinal

**Infectious gastroenteritis**
**Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease-*Helicobacter Pylori***
Infectious hepatitis
Pancreatitis
Biliary tract disease
Peptic ulcer disease
Bowel obstruction
Gastroparesis
Appendicitis
Peritonitis

## Genitourinary

**Urinary tract infection including pyelonephritis**
Ovarian Torsion
Nephrolithiasis

## Metabolic/Toxic

**Drugs-including pregnancy vitamins**
Use and/or withdrawal of cannabinoids or other illicit drugs
Diabetic ketoacidosis
Addison's disease
Thyrotoxicosis
Non-infectious hepatitis
Hypercalcemia
Eating Disorders

## Central-nervous system disease

**Migraine**
Infection
Tumours
Raised intracranial pressure
Vestibular system pathology: labyrinthitis, Meniere's

# Who should care for women with NVP?

NVP is such a common problem in early pregnancy that all maternity caregivers including midwives, general practitioners (GPs) as well as obstetricians should be well placed to care for most women with mild-moderate symptoms (PUQE-24 score ≤ 12). Women often consult their community pharmacists, and they may be an important source of information and advice regarding treatment. One study of the value of professional support, including individualised health education through provision of an information booklet and supportive phone calls for women with NVP, demonstrated a reduction in the severity of symptoms and distress and a significant improvement in quality of life ($p < 0.05$) (54). Even though there was no significant difference between the two groups in body weight gain at week 4; attentive, empathetic care is an important aspect of holistic management.

Clinical assessment and care of women with severe NVP or HG (PUQE-24 score ≥13) should be undertaken by clinicians with experience in recognising the signs and symptoms of HG, and with expertise in managing this condition effectively (LOE- III). These clinicians should be identified within each maternity care setting and depending on local resourcing, this may be an obstetrician, physician (either a general physician, obstetric physician, emergency physician or gastroenterologist) or a general practitioner (GP). This clinician should be designated as the lead clinician for this aspect of the woman's care. We recommend consultation with a dietitian for all women requiring inpatient care and for women with protracted symptoms of severe NVP, especially where there is evidence of malnutrition.

Due to resource availability, access to an experienced clinician may be limited, and consideration should be given to contacting experienced practitioners via an appropriate referral pathway (e.g. to a tertiary maternity hospital) or via telemedicine.

# Where should management for NVP and HG take place?

The majority of women with a PUQE-24 score <13 can be managed in the community, as long as they can tolerate oral medications (LOE-I). In women with severe NVP or HG (PUQE-24 score ≥13), or NVP with inability to tolerate oral intake, community care alone may be inadequate. Women with Type 1 diabetes and other high risk conditions (e.g. short bowel syndrome ) or those requiring continuity of essential oral medications (e.g. severe epilepsy, transplant recipients) should be admitted to hospital at least for initial management and until they are stable (LOE- III) (6).

Where available, Ambulatory Day Stay facilities (maternity or general) and Hospital In the Home (HITH) services should be utilised for women who require parenteral fluid resuscitation and parenteral anti-emetic administration if they are unable to tolerate these orally in the community setting (LOE-II) (55). Outpatient services to manage NVP and HG provide rapid and simple access to symptomatic women and have the potential advantage of self-referral (56). Being able to access outpatient services rather than requiring inpatient admission is beneficial for minimising disruption and maintaining family units.

One study demonstrated ambulatory care enrolment was associated with improvement of symptoms in 89% of women (57). Characteristics of those who failed outpatient care in this study included a higher mean PUQE-24 score at the start of outpatient management, an earlier gestational age at the start of the NVP, and the need for additional adjunctive parenteral fluid during their outpatient management. A randomized controlled trial of 98 women with NVP demonstrated that ambulatory day care management with protocols escalating to intravenous fluid and anti-emetic therapy, reduced admission rates to hospital and was satisfactory to women enrolled in the program (57). A subsequent cost utility analysis confirmed the cost effectiveness of day care management compared to inpatient management (58).

In the absence of access to hospital-based ambulatory day stay facilities and Hospital in the Home, alternative options for provision of care need to be considered. This may include provision of parenteral rehydration therapy and/or antiemetics in:

• the emergency department of the local hospital

• general practice/family practice/community health centres with suitable facilities

• private infusion centres

• non-pregnancy day stay services

All of these sites should seek to provide management in a comprehensive, empathetic environment with advice from a clinician with expertise in treating NVP and HG.

During outpatient management, women require regular review, at least every 1 to 2 weeks, by their lead clinician to ensure appropriate titration of therapy.

## In-Patient Care

In women with severe NVP, community-based care may be insufficient and admission to hospital may be required (LOE-II). HG is the main cause for hospitalisation of pregnant women in the first half of pregnancy. In addition, one recent study documented 38% of women being readmitted after a mean of 11.2 days (59). Three factors were identified that predicted readmission: gestational age < 9 weeks, length of hospitalisation more than 2 days and HG during a previous pregnancy.

Inpatient management is required for women with:

• Severe electrolyte disturbance e.g. potassium < 3.0mmol/L

• Significant renal impairment or acute kidney injury: creatinine > 90 mmol/L

• Concurrent significant co-morbidity e.g. Type 1 diabetes, poorly controlled epilepsy, transplant recipients, or others requiring essential medications

• Malnutrition/continuing significant weight loss despite therapy or starvation ketoacidosis

• Associated conditions requiring inpatient management e.g. infection, hematemesis, refeeding syndrome

In all cases, the lead clinician needs to communicate a clearly documented plan for ongoing management to the patient (See Individual Patient Management Plan below) and the treating team members. This should include details of therapy, arrangements for clinical re-assessment and arrangements for ongoing antenatal care.

## Audit opportunity

What proportion of women receive a written Individual Patient Management Plan?

# What is the best treatment for NVP and HG?

Although NVP is common, not all women seek help. In a subset of respondents in the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, 42.2% of women reporting nausea sought help from a health care practitioner whilst of the 201 women reporting repeated vomiting, 78.6% sought help (60). A recent cross-sectional study from a web-based questionnaire received responses from 9113 women from throughout Europe, North America, and Australia regarding rates of nausea and factors related to the treatment of NVP during pregnancy (61). Amongst these women, 17.9% used "conventional medicines" and 8.3% used herbal medicines. Amongst Australian respondents, the rates were 24 and 21.7% respectively. In a more recent Australian study, only 39% of women used any NVP treatment of which 15% used pharmacotherapy, with most using non-prescription treatments such as vitamin B6, ginger and "natural remedies" (19). The majority (65%) reported they were not offered and did not ask for NVP treatment.

Numerous systematic reviews have attempted to assess the heterogeneous and limited high level evidence for the efficacy and safety of treatments for NVP and HG (62-65). In assessing the response to treatment, the fluctuant nature of NVP and the impact of progressive gestation must be considered, as spontaneous resolution is the norm. Similarly, a number of symptoms of normal pregnancy could be misinterpreted as adverse responses to treatment including bowel disturbance, gastroesophageal reflux, sedation, urinary symptoms as well as vaginal bleeding, abdominal/pelvic pain and miscarriage.

When treating NVP and HG, the woman and her family must be provided with accurate and balanced information to allow them to weigh the benefits of treatment against any maternal or fetal risks, and to make decisions in accordance with their own values and goals.

## Non-pharmacological treatments

Since nausea and vomiting are very common in pregnancy (NVP), many non-pharmacological remedies have been proposed by different cultures. This section is confined to those which have published data associated with their use.

### Rest

The first trimester of pregnancy is frequently associated with fatigue, at a time when pregnancy has often not been declared in public. In a prospective study of more than 7,000 Dutch woman, 44% described daily fatigue and this has been associated with a worsening of pregnancy nausea (66-69). Interventions to improve nausea and fatigue include modification of working patterns, exercise, daytime sleeps and an earlier bedtime, however the data around the efficacy of these interventions is weak (70-73) [LOE-III].

### Diet and nutritional assessment

In a scoping review of the nutritional intake of women with HG, a paucity of data was identified but, unsurprisingly, women with HG had significantly poorer dietary intake compared to non-affected pregnant women, consuming less than 50% of recommended intakes for most nutrients. Nutritional intake worsened with increasing severity of symptoms (74).

Prolonged NVP and HG, with or without weight loss, may cause caloric deficit and nutritional deficiencies (76). In the absence of specific definitions for malnutrition during pregnancy, it would seem prudent to arrange assessment by a dietitian and appropriate investigations including iron studies, liver function tests and vitamin levels where there is clinical suspicion of malnutrition.

Although large observational studies have demonstrated a change in quantity and quality of women's diets with NVP, there is no data on whether this is an effective treatment or merely avoidance (75, 76). An ecological study across 21 countries reported higher rates of nausea and vomiting with higher intake of meat, milk and eggs, and low intake of cereal and pulses (76, 77). However, none of these studies had a pre-pregnancy diet measurement to make a comparison.

A diet with a higher daily intake of saturated fat prior to pregnancy was associated with increased rates of hospitalisation for hyperemesis in an American population (78). Vitamin use, smoking and alcohol consumption have all been linked to a reduced risk of NVP (79, 80). The latter two remedies would of course be inadvisable in pregnancy.

A UK survey indicated that dietitians are underutilised even for in-patients with HG, and a lack of specific clinical guidelines and patient resources further impacts on best nutritional support for these women (81). Women will tend to alter their diets to minimise their symptoms and they should be encouraged to eat whatever and whenever they can to maintain nutrition and hydration. Standard recommendations include eating small, more frequent meals that are low in fat (45, 82). One study has demonstrated that protein meals may selectively reduce nausea and gastric slow wave dysrhythmias in first trimester pregnancy (83).

## Acupuncture/Acupressure

Very few studies are available in English language journals of the use of traditional acupuncture for the treatment of NVP. Only two trials compared acupuncture to sham or placebo treatment, neither found clinically significant improvement in symptoms (84, 85) [LOE-II]. No serious adverse outcomes from the use of acupuncture were reported. A systematic review of the benefits of acupuncture for women with HG included 16 trials covering 1043 women. Although acupuncture did seem to lead to overall improvement, less than 3 trials reported the effect on nausea and or vomiting. The trials were assessed as being of poor quality with a high risk of publication bias (86).

Stimulation of the P6 (Nei guan) point on the wrist has been used for thousands of years by acupuncturists to treat nausea and vomiting from a variety of causes. Acupressure wrist bands are commonly used by women experiencing nausea in early pregnancy. However the Cochrane review published in 2015 of 6 studies comparing acupressure with placebo found no overall significant reduction in women's symptoms (64). A Malaysian study compared two groups of 60 women admitted to hospital for moderately severe hyperemesis who were randomised to wear either acupressure bands or placebo wrist bands for a minimum of 12 hours per day for three days (87). This study did show a significant improvement in the PUQE-24 score on day 3 in those randomised to the treatment arm (mean ± standard deviation: 4.40±0.63 versus 7.10±1.61, p< 0.001). The authors emphasised the importance of wearing the acupressure band for a minimum of 12 hours per day. Interestingly a greater percentage of the placebo group were satisfied with their treatment (85%) than the treatment group (72%, p <0.8). Another Malaysian randomised study of 90 hospitalised women with moderate-severe NVP or HG used acupressure bands for a minimum of 10 minutes, three times over 24 hours in the study group (n=45). All women received antiemetics and IV fluids if required. The treatment group had a statistically significant reduction in nausea and vomiting, antiemetic requirement and PUQE-24 score at 8, 16, and 24 hours post treatment compared with controls (n=45)(88).

Acupressure with wrist bands on the P6 point may reduce symptoms of NVP and HG.

## Hypnosis

A review of 45 studies of the use of hypnosis for NVP found no good quality clinical evidence for its' efficacy (89) [LOE-I].

# Pharmacological Treatments

The principles of holistic management of NVP and HG must include:

- Interventions to reduce nausea, retching and vomiting (Tables 3a,b,c, 4, 5)
- Management of associated gastric dysmotility i.e. gastroesophageal reflux and constipation (Table 6)
- Maintenance of hydration with appropriate fluid and electrolyte replacement (Table 7)
- Maintenance of adequate nutrition including provision of vitamin supplements where required
- Psychosocial assessment and support
- Monitoring and prevention of side effects and adverse pregnancy and fetal outcomes
- In women who are immobile or have additional risk factors for thromboembolism, thromboprophylaxis should be considered unless there are specific contraindications

## Considerations for treatment choices in NVP and HG

- Establish targets for symptom relief:
  - the ability to eat and drink adequately without necessarily complete resolution of NVP
- Discontinue prenatal multivitamins if they are contributing to NVP (LOE- III):
  - two-thirds of women reported an improvement in NVP symptoms after discontinuation of iron-containing prenatal multivitamins in a prospective cohort from Canada (90)
  - The two critical micronutrients which should be continued if possible are iodine (150 mcg per day) and folate (at least 400 mcg per day until 10 weeks)
- The timing of administration of pharmacological therapy should reflect the woman's symptom pattern:
  - symptoms often fluctuate during the day and night and therapy should reflect these individual differences.
- The choice of antiemetic should be individualised, based on the woman's symptoms, previous response to treatment and potential maternal or fetal adverse effects (Table 3a,b,c 4,5) (LOE- I):
  - if an antiemetic is ineffective at maximal dose, discontinue before commencing an alternate agent
  - if an antiemetic is partially effective, optimise dosage and timing, and only add additional agents after maximal doses of the first agent have been trialled
- Oral therapy is usually commenced first and parenteral or subcutaneous treatment reserved for refractory cases (LOE- III). Rectal therapy may have a role but no options are currently available in Australia and New Zealand.
- Written instructions should be given regarding titrating therapy (up and down) as symptoms fluctuate, deteriorate or improve (see Individual Patient Management Plan).
- Regular review of therapy is required in all cases:
  - the natural history of NVP and HG is for spontaneous resolution

## Medications for treatment of NVP and HG

Treatment of NVP and HG may require a range of agents including:

- Antiemetics: herbal/vitamin and prescribed
- Acid suppression
- Laxatives
- Steroids
- Other: e.g. supplements, antidepressants

The most significant factor in prescribing pharmacological treatment for NVP and HG is the potential risk of teratogenicity. These therapies are generally commenced during the first trimester whilst embryogenesis is proceeding. Any potential increase in the risk of congenital malformation needs to be compared with the background rate of congenital malformations which was 3.1% in 2002–2003 (91).

A recent NICE literature review of interventions for management of NVP identified the evidence was generally moderate to low quality (92). They concluded there was moderate-high level evidence for the benefits of ginger, pyridoxine, dopamine-D2 receptor antagonists (e.g. metoclopramide), serotonin antagonists (e.g. ondansetron) and corticosteroids (e.g. hydrocortisone or prednisone) [LOE II-III]. There was only low level evidence for the benefit of histamine-1 receptor antagonists (e.g. doxylamine or promethazine) [LOE-III] (93). Regarding adverse maternal effects, serotonin antagonists and corticosteroids were less sedating than histamine antagonists. There was no evidence for assessing other agents commonly used for NVP and HG including cyclizine.

Pharmacological treatment for NVP and HG should be used as part of a holistic approach to management including non-drug measures, psychosocial support and ongoing obstetric/midwifery care. Almost all pharmacological treatment is "off license" and based on historical experience with a limited amount of high quality research data described in small trials or systematic reviews or meta-analyses. When selecting pharmacotherapy for NVP and HG, the prescriber needs to make a rational assessment of maternal and fetal benefit versus risk, ensuring appropriate counselling and shared decision-making with the woman, noting that in the vast majority of cases benefit will outweigh risks.

## Commencement and titration of pharmacological treatment for NVP or HG:

- Mild-moderate NVP:
  - start with ginger ±B6 (92) [LOE-II]
  - add oral antihistamine or dopamine antagonist if needed [LOE-II-III]
- Moderate-severe NVP or inadequate response to initial treatment:
  - As above for mild-moderate:
    - if effective; continue and titrate to maximal dose
    - if ineffective-cease.

Plus the following:

- antihistamine or dopamine antagonist: IV/IM until able to tolerate oral [CBR]
- excessive sedation or inadequate response: add /substitute oral or IV serotonin antagonist (ondansetron) at least during daytime [CPP]
- add acid suppression therapy [LOE-II]
- Refractory NVP or HG:
  - As for moderate-severe
  - consider addition of corticosteroids [LOE-II-III]
  - intensify acid suppression [CPP]
- Manage/prevent constipation with laxatives [EBR]

# 1. Antiemetics

A number of systematic reviews and expert reviews of the efficacy and safety of routinely used pharmacological treatments for NVP and HG have been published (62, 63, 92, 94-100) [LOE-I]. Those medications have been included as options in Tables 3a, b, c. Table 4 describes the use of serotonin receptor antagonists and corticosteroids, and these are discussed in detail below.

In a recent systematic review, McParlin et al concluded that all routinely prescribed antiemetics including antihistamines, metoclopramide (for mild symptoms), pyridoxine-doxylamine, and ondansetron (for moderate symptoms) were more effective than placebo (65) [LOE-I]. In a study of women presenting to an Emergency Room, when comparing 4 commonly used antiemetics (ondansetron versus metoclopramide versus promethazine or prochlorperazine), there was no difference in response in terms of time from administration to discharge (101) [LOE-III]. Other trials have evaluated alternative antiemetics and there was no convincing evidence of superiority of any particular drug (LOE- I) (102). Intravenous metoclopramide and promethazine appear to be equally effective at least in the first 24 hours of use (100) [LOE-II]. Several other potential antiemetic agents have been used but are not available as monotherapy in Australia or New Zealand (e.g. dimenhydrinate is only available in combination with caffeine and hyoscine (e.g. chlorpromazine) and are therefore not included in this Position Statement.

**Metoclopramide** is generally recommended as a first line anti-emetic agent. Its usage was impacted by warnings from the FDA (2009) and EMA (2013) regarding the risk of neurological adverse events (extrapyramidal disorders, tardive dyskinesia or dystonia) with prolonged or high dose usage (103, 104). In women aged 18-44, 94.4% of neurological adverse events (excluding tardive dyskinesia) occurred in the first 5 days of use with a much lower rate (1.2%) after this (105). Women initiated on metoclopramide should be closely monitored and informed about the symptoms and risks of extrapyramidal effects especially during the first few days of treatment and advised to use metoclopramide for the shortest possible duration and lowest effective dose (103). A recent meta-analysis has concluded there is no increased risk of congenital malformation with the use of metoclopramide (OR, 1.14 [0.93–1.38]) (106)

**Serotonin receptor antagonists** are the most effective antiemetic drugs available outside of pregnancy, but there remains controversy about their use in pregnancy. In women with HG, one RCT concluded that ondansetron was superior to metoclopramide in reducing vomiting (p=0.04) but not nausea (107), whilst another RCT found the antiemetic and antinauseant effects were equivalent but there were less adverse effects (drowsiness and dry mouth) with ondansetron (108) [LOE-II].

The pregnancy safety data for ondansetron has been conflicting. A recent meta-analysis by Picot et al including 13 studies up to 2019 (9 cohort, 4 case-control) concluded that first trimester exposure to ondansetron was associated with an increased risk of ventricular septal defects (VSD) (OR 1.11 [1.00–1.23] but not atrial septal defects (109). There was also a significantly increased risk of cleft palate (OR 1.48 [1.19–1.84] but not cleft lip . There was no statistically significant association for major congenital malformations, overall cardiac malformations, atrial septal defects or cleft lip with or without cleft palate. This meta-analysis did not include three more recent studies (110-113).

In a large multinational cohort study from areas of Canada, the UK and the USA, women receiving a prescription for ondansetron (n=69605) were compared with women receiving prescriptions for either diclectin (doxylamine with B6), metoclopramide, or promethazine (n=178,485) during the first trimester (110). There was no significant increase in major congenital malformations or in cardiac defects. The study was not able to assess the rate of oral clefts.

In contrast, Lemon et al found an increased risk of cardiac defects in offspring of women taking ondansetron (111). In this study, the risk equated to one additional VSD for approximately every 330 pregnancies exposed in the first trimester, above the estimated background risk of 2.62 [2.59-2.65] per 1000 live births (112). The association was dose-dependent with increased risk in women receiving the highest cumulative doses, although the confidence limits were large [aRR 3.2 [1.0-9.9]]. In a prospective, comparative, observational cohort study comparing pregnancies exposed to metoclopramide (n=110), ondansetron (n=195) and controls (n=371); the overall rate of major anomalies did not differ significantly (110). The rate of anomalies was low: 2.0 % ondansetron, 0.9 % metoclopramide and 1.8 % controls. All the anomalies in both the ondansetron and metoclopramide groups were cardiac septal defects, most of which spontaneously resolved. Zambelli-Weiner et al performed a nested, case-control study using a large US administrative claims database spanning 15 years. Early exposure to ondansetron occurred in 76,330 mother-child pairs which was associated with a statistically increased risk of cardiac (OR 1.52 [1.35–1.70) defects (113). This study has been heavily criticised for methodological flaws and serious conflict of interest (114).

While some studies have demonstrated an increase in cleft palate (115, 116), others have shown either no increase or a decrease in cleft palate (117-121). In one of the studies that did show an increased risk (Huybrechts), ondansetron use would equate to an additional 2.7 [0.2 to 5.2] oral clefts per 10,000 births with a background risk of 12/10000 (116, 122). The most recent systematic review included 11 cohort and 9 case control studies and found no association with either oral cleft or cardiac defects (123).

In the absence of consistent evidence of harm, the use of ondansetron has increased rapidly since 2006, with an associated decline in the use of promethazine and metoclopramide since 2014 (124). In these studies, the prevalence of ondansetron, promethazine, metoclopramide, or doxylamine/ pyridoxine use anytime in pregnancy was 15.2%, 10.3%, 4.0%, and 0.4%, respectively and there was a >20% increase in ondansetron use .

A single pilot study has suggested that maternal genotype for serotonin receptor gene SNPs may determine the responsiveness of an individual to serotonin receptor antagonists and allow more individualised prescribing (125).

**Corticosteroids** are used for a variety of indications in pregnancy. In women with HG, the usual corticosteroids used have been hydrocortisone and prednisolone. Prednisolone is lipophilic so it can cross the placenta, but fetal uptake is limited by active retrograde transport by P-glycoprotein, and its conversion to inactive metabolites by placental 11ß-HSD2 (126). Six randomised studies have assessed the efficacy and safety of corticosteroids for management of severe NVP or HG (127-132). Three compared corticosteroids with placebo or promethazine or metoclopramide in women with severe symptoms. Improvements were seen in all corticosteroid groups, but the only statistically significant difference was reduced vomiting in 2 of these studies, particularly prior to 10 weeks (128, 132). No safety concerns were reported in these trials.

The use of prednisone/prednisolone /hydrocortisone during pregnancy requires expert management and monitoring. Although moderate doses may be required initially (see Treatment Algorithm), the dose should be weaned as soon as appropriate to the minimum effective dose and ceased when symptoms are manageable with alternate therapies. Adverse effects of corticosteroids are related to both dose and duration of therapy and include: hyperglycemia, hypertension, weight gain and osteoporosis. There is an increased risk of infection but in the absence of other immunosuppressive or additional risk factors, prophylaxis for Pneumocystis jirovecii is not recommended. With prolonged treatment (e.g. prednisolone >7.5mg/day for > 3 weeks), adrenal suppression may occur and precipitate adrenal crisis during periods of stress. Appropriate monitoring by a suitable experienced clinician should be arranged if corticosteroids are used for more than 3 weeks. Detailed patient information should be provided including written advice regarding weaning dose plans and avoiding sudden cessation.

Older data from the National Birth Defect Prevention Study in the USA (1995-2001, 1997-2002) has reported an association between maternal corticosteroid use in early pregnancy with cleft lip, with or without cleft palate, in the offspring (OR 1.7 [1.1–2.6]), but not cleft palate alone (133, 134). However, in these studies, there were very few women treated with systemic corticosteroids. Further studies from the same registry (2003-2009) found no association between maternal corticosteroid use and cleft lip and palate in 12 women exposed to systemic corticosteroids (135). Over a similar period (1995-2001), Källén studied the drug associations with cleft lip and/or palate in Sweden and found no significant association (OR 1.94 [0.78–3.99]) (136). Pradat et al used data from 9 malformation registries (n=11,150 cases) collected over 13 years and found no increased risk of cleft palate or lip overall (OR 1.25 [0.72–2.15]) although there was a slight increase in the offspring of women who received corticosteroids in combination with another agent (n=61 exposures, OR 2.59 [1.18-5.6]) (137).

A prospective cohort study and meta-analysis of cohort and case-control studies of corticosteroid use in pregnancy found no significant increase in major malformations (1.45 (95% CI: 0.80-2.60) although in case-control studies only (n=4), there was an increased risk of oral cleft (OR 3.35 [1.97-5.69]) (138). No significant effect was seen when the 6 cohort studies were also included in the meta-analysis. In a surveillance study of Michigan Medicaid recipients involving 229,101 completed pregnancies conducted between 1985 and 1992, 143, 236, and 222 newborns had been exposed to prednisolone, prednisone, and methylprednisolone, respectively, during the first trimester. There was no association between exposure to these agents and congenital defects (99).

The very small amount of gestation specific data for corticosteroid exposure during the relevant period of embryogenesis (starting during the 5th week of gestation, completed by the 10th(139)) indicates there is no apparent increased risk of oral cleft or other congenital malformation (LOE-II). Major teratology services have now reassessed their advice and state that : " If there is an increased chance, it appears to be very small and most pregnancies would not be affected"(140) Corticosteroids should be considered third line treatment after non-pharmacological agents and antiemetics and reserved for more severe NVP or HG (LOE- III).

The following tables on page 18 describe the mechanism of action, efficacy, dosing and potential side effects of medications used for NVP and HG.

**Tables 3a, 3b, 3c:** Oral antiemetic medications for mild-moderate NVP .
Dosing: BD- twice a day, TDS-three times per day, QID-four times per day, max-maximum recommended total daily dose.
Note: *Do not combine these agents with similar mechanism of action and side effects S-sedating, preferably use nocte only.

| Table 3a Herbal/Vitamin | Ginger | Vitamin B6 (Pyridoxine) |
|---|---|---|
| Mechanism of action | Improvement in gastrointestinal motility: weak effect on cholinergic M3 receptors and serotonergic 5-HT3 and 5-HT4 receptors in the gut | Water soluble vitamin, inhibits H1 receptor, acts indirectly on vestibular system, some inhibition of muscarinic receptors to decrease stimulation of vomiting centre |
| Evidence for efficacy | ↓N but not V [LOE-I] Superior to placebo Equal to Vitamin B6, dimenhydrinate, metoclopramide, doxylamine, P6 (LOE- II) | ↓N but not V Less effective than dimenhydrinate (LOE- I) |
| Recommended [maximum daily dose] | Use standardised products rather than foods e.g. 250 mg TDS-QID [1000mg] | 10 to 25 mg PO 3-4x/day [200 mg] Or 37.5 mg combined with ginger 600 mg up to 2x/day |
| Side effects | Heartburn | Sensory neuropathy has been reported with chronic intake of pyridoxine at doses >500 mg/day |
| Risk of teratogenesis | No increase | No increase |
| Practice points | Theoretical but unproven risk of bleeding risk by decreasing platelet-aggregation. May inhibit growth of Helicobacter Pylori | More effective when used in combination e.g. with doxylamine or dicyclomine (equivalent to metoclopramide) |

| Table 3b Histamine/Dopamine Antagonists | Doxylamine[s]/ Diphenhydramine[s] Cyclizine[s]/ Promethazine[s] | Metoclopramide |
|---|---|---|
| Mechanism of action | Indirectly affect the vestibular system, decreasing stimulation of the vomiting centre | Dopamine and serotonin receptor antagonist which stimulates upper gastrointestinal motility and acts on CNS vomiting centre |
| Evidence for efficacy | DOXYLAMINE: ↓N compared with placebo, with or without pyridoxine (LOE II) DIPHENHYDRAMINE/CYCLIZINE/ PROMETHAZINE: (LOE-III) | Equal to ondansetron for N but less effective for V (LOE-II) |
| Recommended [maximum daily dose] Use one of the following only- do not combine | DOXYLAMINE: 6.25-25 mg TDS [50 mg] DIPHENHYDRAMINE: 25-50 mg TDS [150 mg] CYCLIZINE: 12.5-50 mg TDS [150 mg] PROMETHAZINE: 25 mg TDS [75 mg] | 10 mg TDS [30 mg] |
| Side effects | Sedation, anticholinergic effects | Initial -Dystonia, Akathisia, depression. Prolonged use: Rare: tardive dyskinesia |
| Risk of teratogenesis | No increase | No increase |
| Practice points | Doxylamine and diphenhydramine are available as a non-prescription sleeping tablets. These agents are sedating and best reserved for evening dosing. | Less sedation. To reduce the risk of extrapyramidal side effects- use for the shortest possible duration and lowest effective dose (see above) |

| Table 3c Phenothiazines* | Prochlorperazines |
|---|---|
| Mechanism of action | Central and peripheral dopamine antagonists |
| Evidence for efficacy | Superior to placebo for NVP (LOE-I) |
| Recommended dose [maximum daily dose] | 5-10 mg TDS [30 mg] |
| Side effects | Sedation, akathisia, anticholinergic effects, hypotension Rare: dystonias, tardive dyskinesia with chronic use |
| Risk of teratogenesis | No increase |
| Practice points | Best reserved for evening dosing |

| | Ondansetron | Corticosteroids |
|---|---|---|
| **Mechanism of action** | Central (medullary vomiting centre) and peripheral (small bowel) serotonin receptor blocker | Antiemetic effect on the chemoreceptor trigger zone in the brainstem |
| **Evidence for efficacy** | Superior to combination doxylamine/B6 for reduction in N and V [LOE-II]<br>Superior to metoclopramide for reduction of V but not N in HG [LOE-II] | Improved sense of wellbeing, appetite and increased weight gain in HG patients<br>No difference in days of hospital admission or readmission rates compared to placebo<br>Equal to promethazine with fewer side-effects (LOE-I)<br>Superior to IV metoclopramide (LOE-I) |
| **Recommended dose [maximum daily dose]** | 4-8 mg up to TDS [16mg] | Prednisone 40-50 mg/day.<br>May be commenced as hydrocortisone 100 mg IV BD [200mg] |
| **Side effects** | Constipation, headache, dizziness<br>Rare: QT prolongation, serotonin syndrome in combination with other serotonergic drugs | Potential Cushing's syndrome, mood disturbance, hypertension, hyperglycemia |
| **Risk of teratogenesis** | Conflicting data. No overall risk in birth defects but a possible increased risk of cleft palate and ventricular septal defect when used in the first trimester<br>**See detailed discussion above** | Possible increased risk of oral clefts when used < 10 week's gestation, but data are weak<br>**See detailed discussion above** |
| **Practice Points** | No sedation<br>Expensive<br>Available as tablets, wafers and oral dispersible formulations<br>Ensure concurrent management of constipation. Bowel obstruction has been reported<br>Recommended as second line agents | Consider withholding until after 10 weeks gestation if alternate therapy an option<br>Restrict to refractory cases<br>Wean to 10 to 12.5 mg/day over 7 to 10 days then by 2.5 mg/day every 3 days to minimum effective dose.<br>Increase folate to 5 mg, oral, once per day if prescribing steroids in first trimester |

**Table 4:** Oral antiemetic medications for severe NVP and HG

## Mode of administration of pharmacological therapy:

Depending on the severity of NVP, oral therapy is usually commenced first and parenteral or subcutaneous treatment reserved for refractory cases (Table 5). Oral dispersible formulations are available for some medications, e.g. ondansetron but these are not absorbed sublingually and need to be swallowed like tablets. Outpatient continuous subcutaneous antiemetic management has been described in a number of observational studies (141, 142). If available, subcutaneous ondansetron appears to be more effective than subcutaneous metoclopramide although both significantly reduced the risk of rehospitalisation (LOE-III). However, almost half the women still required intravenous hydration during the treatment period and patients remained on therapy for a mean of 22.3 +/– 20.2 days (141).

At present, subcutaneous microinfusion pumps of these antiemetic therapies do not appear to be cost effective when compared with conventional treatment alternatives, including periodic hospitalisation (LOE- II) (141, 142)

| | Dosage [maximum daily dose] | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| **Metoclopramide** | 10 mg IV TDS [0.5 mg/kg to max 30 mg]<br>Or<br>1.2 to 1.8 mg/hour intravenously by infusion<br>Or<br>Subcutaneous infusion 20-40 mg/day | Slow IV over 2-20 min<br>Sedation |
| **Cyclizine** | 50 mg slow IV BD-TDS [150mg] | Severe sedation |
| **Droperidol** | 0.5 to 1 mg/hour [25 mg] | Sedation |
| **Promethazine** | 25 mg IM or IV TDS-QID [100 mg] | Sedation |
| **Prochlorperazine** | 5 to 10 mg IV TDS-QID [30mg] | Sedation |
| **Ondansetron** | 4-16 mg IV TDS [16mg]<br>SC infusion 16-28 mg/day | Avoid in women with pre-existing QT prolongation<br>IV doses > 8 mg (up to a maximum of 16 mg) should be infused over at least 15 minutes |
| **Methylprednisolone** | 16 mg TDS for 48 to 72 hours [48mg] | As per oral corticosteroids |
| **HYdrocortisone** | 100 mg IV BD [200mg] | |

**Table 5:** Parenteral/subcutaneous antiemetics (141, 143) - for additional information see Tables 3a, 3b, 3c and 4

# What other pharmacological therapies are being trialled/considered for women with NVP and HG?

A number of other agents have been used for treatment of NVP and HG in small studies but are not yet in routine use or are not available in Australia and New Zealand. None of these agents are recommended by this guideline.

- A **delayed-release combination of doxylamine succinate and pyridoxine hydrochloride** has completed Phase 3 Trial with demonstrated efficacy but is not currently available in Australia or New Zealand (144).

- **Transdermal granisetron:** In a small pilot study, women with NVP received a single dose of IV granisetron followed by application of a 34.3 mg granisetron patch (145). This was left on for 7 days and produced persistent, relief equal to the initial IV dose for up to 3 days after patch removal (145). In the future, transdermal agents may be a valuable addition for management of NVP and HG.

- **Transdermal clonidine:** One small study of 12 women with treatment resistant HG used a 5 mg clonidine patch in a sequential placebo controlled study (146). Clonidine is a centrally acting, alpha-2 adrenergic agonist which has been used in pregnancy for management of hypertension but has also been effective for prevention of postoperative nausea and vomiting. The mechanism underlying the antiemetic effect is as yet unknown: it may involve a direct effect on nausea and vomiting trigger zones in the midbrain or a secondary effect with reduction of the level of noradrenergic activation. In this trial, clonidine led to a significantly greater improvement in NVP associated with a small reduction of blood pressure: systolic 6 mmHg and diastolic 3 mmHg.

- **Mirtazapine,** a tetracyclic antidepressant with central alpha-2 and 5HT-3 receptor blocking ability has been used for both depression and HG (147-150). It reduced both NVP and depression at a dose of 7.5-45 mg per day with the only side effects being dry mouth and sedation. Limited data suggests no increased risk of congenital malformation when used in pregnancy (150). However, the number of women treated with mirtazapine for HG remains small and it is not considered a standard drug for nausea and vomiting in pregnancy. A randomised trial of mirtazapine versus ondansetron versus placebo (1:1;1) is being conducted in Denmark but recruiting has been delayed and it is yet to report (NCT03785691) (151).

- **Gabapentin:** The safety data regarding gabapentin use in the first trimester is based on its role as an anticonvulsant, where monotherapy has not been shown to increase congenital malformations (152). A double-blind, randomized, multi-centre trial of women with refractory HG compared oral gabapentin (1800-2400mg/d) with either oral ondansetron (24-32mg/d) or metoclopramide (45-60mg/d) for 7 days (153). The trial recruited over a 5 year period and changed the comparator from ondansetron to metoclopramide after 2 years. Despite the long recruitment period, only small numbers completed the double-blind phase and were available for analysis (gabapentin n=10, ondansetron and metoclopramide combined n=7. The gabapentin group appeared to have a significant benefit as measured by the PUQE-24 score (p<0.01). Oral nutrition was also improved (p<0.01)

  Gabapentin has been useful in reducing postoperative nausea and vomiting and the postulated mechanisms include a reduction in calcium signalling in the area postrema as well as a decreased tachykinin neurotransmission. Further studies of this agent are indicated.

- **Diazepam:** Benzodiazepines such as diazepam are thought to be helpful in HG, presumably through alleviating psychosomatic symptoms such as anxiety. However, the safety of these medications in pregnancy is still controversial with some studies demonstrating a positive association between neonatal exposure to diazepam and prematurity and low birth weight (63). Several observational studies have reported using intravenous diazepam as an adjunct for women with HG. In one study, 74 women with refractory HG were given IV fluids with or without IV diazepam (mean dose 62.8 +/- 24.5 mg (range 40-160) (154). The number of hospitalisations was significantly lower, and patient satisfaction was significantly higher in the diazepam group. In a second randomised study, 50 women with HG were treated with IV fluids and vitamins plus or minus diazepam. The mean stay in hospital was shorter in the diazepam group (4.5 +/- 1.9 vs. 6 +/- 1.6 days p < 0.05) and readmission to the hospital was 4% in the diazepam group versus 27% in the control group (p < 0.05) (155). There was a significant reduction in nausea in the diazepam group (p < 0.05) and a significant reduction in vomiting was observed in both groups.

- **Cannabis/cannabis based products:** The antiemetic properties of delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) has been used in a number of conditions including chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting. Clinical trials using nabilone and dronabinol (a purified synthetic THC) confirmed antiemetic activity that was superior to placebo, and in some studies, superior to prochlorperazine (156). Its' use in pregnancy has been associated with preterm birth, decreased fetal growth, and death within the first year as well as maternal anemia, but lower rates of preeclampsia and gestational diabetes(157, 158). Other studies have found evidence suggesting increased risk of childhood psychopathology following prenatal cannabis exposure (159).

  In a survey of women,14% reported using cannabis or cannabis based products and 82% reported symptom relief compared with 60% of women using standard medical therapy (157). Among women who reported weight loss during pregnancy, 56% of cannabis users reported gaining weight within two weeks of treatment. Koren et al described a similar effect in 4 women. In a further retrospective study, 79 women reported using cannabis during their pregnancies. Over 92% rated cannabis as 'extremely effective' or 'effective' (160). THC containing products are available for medicinal use in a number of countries. While more research is needed before cannabis can be considered for use in HG, these reports suggests that cannabis should be tested in appropriately powered, controlled trials, addressing both maternal effect and potential adverse fetal effects.

- **NK-1 receptor (NK-1R) inhibitors:** the NK-1R and Substance P are present in brain regions involved in the vomiting reflex. NK1 receptor antagonists (e.g. aprepitant , fosaprepitant, netupitant) are potent antiemetics but they have not been tested in pregnancy. The placenta produces 2 kinds of tachykinins; endokinin (EKB) and neurokinin A (NKA). They are signalled by three G protein-coupled neurokinin receptors (NK1-3R). Women who do not experience vomiting during pregnancy appear to have a natural downregulation or reduced sensitivity of the NK1 vomiting receptor in their brains (161). Salivation is also mediated via the NK1 receptor and dysregulation may account for the ptyalism associated with HG (161). The tachykinins are important in placental vascular development and inhibition of their effect may be detrimental.

## 2. Acid suppression

Many women with vomiting in pregnancy experience symptoms of gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD ) as well, and the presence of such symptoms is associated with more severe NVP (162). The treatment of GORD, along with anti-emetic therapy, has been associated with reduced PUQE-24 scores (9.6 ± 3.0 to 6.5 ± 2.5, $P < .0001$) and improved quality of life scores (4.0 ± 2.0 to 6.8 ± 1.6, p < .0001) (Table 6) (LOE- I) (163). The mechanism of this association is primarily related to gastroesophageal motility. Neuromuscular abnormalities of the stomach associated with symptomatic nausea in pregnancy include gastric dysrhythmias, both brady- and tachy (164). In HG, the gastric myoelectrical pattern is a flatline or arrhythmic pattern. The mechanisms underlying this gastric dysrhythmia are poorly understood. Estrogen and progesterone administered to healthy women induced gastric dysrhythmias, particularly bradygastrias (165). Thyroid dysfunction may also disrupt intestinal pacemaker activity and changes in intravascular volume status that affect vasopressin secretion may contribute to gastric dysrhythmia (164).

Histamine-2 receptor antagonists are recommended as first line although proton pump inhibitors may be more readily available. Concerns have been raised regarding an increased risk of childhood asthma in the offspring of women treated with acid suppressive agents (166), however, none of the studies adjusted for the full panel of known confounders and the true risk has not been determined.

| Therapy | Dose | Risk | Comment |
|---|---|---|---|
| **H2 antagonists** | Famotidine 20 mg OD or BD Nizatadine 150MG OD or BD | No increase in congenital malformations | Well tolerated Famotidine is safe to use; there is less experience with nizatidine |
| **Proton-pump inhibitors** | Omeprazole 20 mg OD-BD Lansoprazole 30 mg OD-BD Rabeprazole 20 mg OD-BD Esomeprazole 40 mg OD-BD Pantoprazole 40 mg OD-BD | No increase in congenital malformations | Well tolerated |

**Table 6:** Acid suppression for symptoms of gastroesophageal reflux (167-170)

## 3. Laxatives and stool softeners

Dehydration, gastric dysrhythmia and other drugs used for treatment of NVP, particularly ondansetron, can contribute to significant and symptomatic constipation in women with NVP and HG. Increasing dietary fibre and fluids is the preferred treatment of constipation during pregnancy, although this can be difficult in women with restricted diet due to NVP. In a systematic review of treatments for constipation in pregnancy, stimulant laxatives produced significantly more improvement in constipation but also significantly more abdominal discomfort and diarrhoea whilst fibre supplementation increased frequency of stools [LOE- II] (171). High dose or combination therapy with laxatives and stool softeners is often required, especially with concomitant treatment with ondansetron.

Non-absorbed stool softeners such as docusate sodium (120mg OD-BD) may be effective with or without laxatives. For refractory cases, occasional use of magnesium salts or lactulose is considered suitable for use in pregnancy [LOE- II]. Castor oil can stimulate uterine contractions and excessive use of mineral oil can interfere with absorption of fat soluble vitamins, so these agents are generally avoided. Stimulant laxatives such as senna or bisacodyl are effective but are associated with abdominal discomfort and should be used with caution in pregnancy although they are not associated with any increase in congenital malformations [LOE- III]. In general, the short-term use of stimulant laxatives is considered safe in pregnancy. Osmotic laxatives such as lactulose (15-30ml OD-BD), sorbitol or macrogol (one sachet OD-BD) may be required although the large fluid volume required for ingestion may be poorly tolerated. As with the general population, long-term use of laxatives should be avoided.

Fibre-containing bulking agents are probably the safest laxatives to be used in pregnancy, as they are not systemically absorbed. These agents take several days to exert their effects and are therefore not suitable for acute symptom relief. They are also contraindicated in faecal impaction. Adverse events related to bulking agents include excessive gas, crampy pain and abdominal bloating.

Rectal treatments including bisacodyl, sodium phosphate and sodium citrate/lauryl sulfoacetate/sorbitol enemas or glycerol suppositories may also be required. An excellent guide to laxatives and enemas has been previously published in Australia (172).

## Audit Opportunity

What proportion of women with NVP or HG are discharged with a prescription for ongoing treatment?
What proportion of women with moderate-severe NVP or HG are prescribed acid suppressive therapy?
What proportion of women with moderate-severe NVP or HG are prescribed laxatives?

# 4. Additional Treatments

**Treatment for ptyalism**

Ptyalism, or excess salivation, is a common accompaniment to HG. It is often accompanied by difficulty swallowing saliva which exacerbates nausea. It has been suggested that this symptom is mediated by placental neurokinins including endokinin (161). The incidence is greater in more severe cases (59% versus 9%), in those with persistent vomiting for greater than 24 hours after admission (69% versus 23%) and in women who were admitted repeatedly for treatment compared with those admitted only once (p<0.05) (173). Among the subset of women presenting with nausea and vomiting to a hospital clinic in Quebec, Canada, 26% complained of excess salivation at their first prenatal visit (174).

Chewing gum may give some relief. One approach to treatment is to use drugs with anticholinergic properties e.g. amitriptyline in small doses e.g. 10-25 mg once or twice a day [LOE- III]. In a small study of palliative care patients, transdermal clonidine was used to control ptyalism with a good clinical response observed (175). This therapy has also been trialled for HG in small, pilot groups and remains untested but of interest (146).

**Treatment for *Helicobacter (H.) Pylori***

Dual or triple eradication therapy for H. Pylori has been used in a small number of case control and one randomised study (176). In a study of 156 women with HG and a positive fecal stool antigen test for H. Pylori, all were given standard antiemetic treatment and half received dual eradication therapy with lansoprazole and amoxicillin for 2 weeks. There was a significantly improved complete response rate in the treatment arm, 81% versus 59% (p .003) although they did not report evidence of eradication as the cause for improvement and the use of a proton pump inhibitor alone may have been the active agent. Further trials are required in this area. In refractory cases of HG, investigation for H. Pylori infection and eradication may be considered [LOE-III] (6).

# When should intravenous fluid and parental feeding be used for management of NVP and HG?

## Fluid management

Intravenous (IV) fluid and electrolyte replacement is an important part of symptomatic management of nausea and vomiting, as well as for correction of dehydration in women with NVP or HG. IV fluids have been shown to reduce vomiting (155) and are therefore valuable for both outpatient and inpatient management of the symptoms of HG and severe NVP as well as associated dehydration and electrolyte disorders [LOE- I]. Women in the placebo arm of controlled trials for NVP demonstrated a significant improvement in nausea with supportive treatment including IV fluids without antiemetics [LOE-1] (102).

The prescription of IV fluid therapy should take into account the degree of dehydration and any electrolyte disturbances (Table 7). Care needs to be taken using any dextrose based solution as Wernicke's encephalopathy may be precipitated in women with thiamine deficiency (177). In addition, in the setting of severe hyponatremia, serum sodium should not be corrected faster than 10mmol/L per 24 hours to prevent central pontine myelinolysis (178).

Only one study has compared 5% dextrose–0.9% sodium chloride with 0.9% sodium chloride with no significant difference in episodes of vomiting, duration of IV antiemetic use, length of hospital stay, or persistence of ketonuria but nausea improved faster in the dextrose group, an effect that had dissipated by 24 hours (179). Should ongoing fluid administration be required, fluid balance (input and output) should be monitored for the duration of the treatment cycle. IV fluid resuscitation with or without electrolytes (potassium, magnesium and phosphate) replacement should be prescribed as required [LOE- I].

Intravenous fluid therapy should preferably be administered in an outpatient setting where available, as this has been associated with equivalent patient satisfaction outcomes and lower total hospitalisation days in small studies [LOE- II](65, 180). In one study, women with HG randomised to either Day Care or inpatient treatment required only a total of 1-2 visits for outpatient fluids with a significant reduction in symptoms and high satisfaction (57, 180). The inpatient group received slightly higher volumes of fluid overall at 5.5 L [IQR 4–13L] compared with 4L [2–8L] in the Day Stay women, (p< .01). Twenty eight of 42 women randomised to Day Care did not require admission for further treatment. In a second study, rapid fluid therapy as part of outpatient care has been demonstrated to improve patient experience and was safe and efficacious with 60% of women being discharged after one treatment cycle in a Day Stay Facility (56). A number of options may be available for outpatient IV fluid therapy depending on the patient's location.

Clear pathways for access to outpatient fluid therapy can give women a sense of control over their symptoms which can be very helpful.

| Type of fluid | Quantity/Rate | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| **0.9% sodium chloride** | 1-2 L. Initial rate 1L/hour | Further IV fluids should be given at a rate of 1L/1-2 hours or slower to correct dehydration and electrolytes (see below) |
| **4% dextrose and 0.18% sodium chloride or 5% dextrose** | 1 L. Initial rate 1L/2 hours. | Consider as an option if minimal oral intake, starvation or uncontrolled nausea and only after correction of thiamine deficiency (200-300mg IV) and exclusion of hyponatremia |
| Add electrolytes as required : these are high risk medications, administer as per local guidelines | | |
| **Potassium chloride** | 30-40 mmol/L. Maximum infusion rate 10mmol over 1 hour | Administer with caution. Preferred product is premixed 30mmol potassium chloride in 1 L bags of 0.9% sodium chloride. Use large peripheral vein or central venous access only. |
| **Magnesium sulphate** | 10-20 mmol/ day over 20-40 minutes | Dilute with 100ml 0.9% sodium chloride. Use large peripheral vein or central venous access only. |

**Table 7:** Recommendations for parenteral replacement of IV fluids and electrolytes

# Enteral and parenteral nutrition

HG leads to dehydration, fluid and electrolyte abnormalities, and inadequate nutrition. In severe cases, if antiemetic and steroid therapy has failed, nutritional support via enteral or parenteral routes may be required to adequately restore hydration, correct electrolyte imbalances and maintain nutrition. The parameters surrounding this escalation in therapy have not been defined, but typically are considered if there is ongoing sustained weight loss or failure to achieve appropriate weight gain, or ongoing inability to tolerate oral feeding despite antiemetic therapy.

A multidisciplinary approach to these alternative forms of therapy is essential including physician, obstetrician, dietitian and psycho-social support as indicated (6). **Enteral feeding** may be administered via naso-gastric or naso-jejunal tube, or via percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy or jejunostomy. Care should be taken to ensure an experienced operator places a suitable naso-enteral feeding tube. Although a number of case reports have supported its role, a recent randomised controlled trial demonstrated that early enteral tube feeding did not improve maternal weight gain, duration of hospital stays, NVP symptoms, perinatal outcomes or birth weight. Dissatisfaction with the therapy was high, and compliance poor (181).

In a large retrospective cohort study, women receiving enteral nutrition achieved similar maternal weight gain and pregnancy outcomes compared to those on other fluid or nutrition regimens despite having lost significantly more weight prior to commencing therapy (181). Enteral feeding was associated with a greater length of hospital stay and was complicated by tube clogging and inadvertent tube expulsion whilst vomiting in 54%. Other studies have demonstrated expulsion rates between 11 and 75% (181-184).

Percutaneous endoscopic placement of gastro-jejunal feeding tubes is feasible and can be undertaken successfully in the second trimester. This reduces the risk of early dislodgement and the need for multiple tube replacements and their associated radiation exposure. A small case series confirmed adequate maternal weight gain and no adverse perinatal outcomes, but no significant improvement in the symptoms of nausea (185). Of note here is the longer duration of use of feeding tube and the low rates of dislodgement compared with naso-gastric placement. However, there is a significant cost burden associated with prolonged nutritional support (185-188). Enteral solutions are considered more comprehensive in their nutrient composition although there remains a risk of refeeding syndrome (189).

In the MOTHER trial, a multicentre, open-label randomized controlled study of 116 women hospitalized for HG between 5 and 20 weeks gestation, participants were randomly allocated to enteral tube feeding in addition to standard care (intravenous rehydration and antiemetic treatment) or to standard care alone. Women were encouraged to continue tube feeding at home (181). Of the women allocated to enteral tube feeding, 8/59 never received a tube and 23 (39%) discontinued at <7 days because of adverse effects. There was no improvement in maternal status (weight gain, duration of hospital stay, readmission rate, severity of NVP, quality of life, physical and psychosocial functioning, anxiety pr psychological distress) or perinatal outcomes including birth weight .

Although rarely required, enteral nutrition is a therapy of last resort, and can be associated with both complications and compliance issues [LOE- II]. Patient education and involvement in the clinical decision making is essential to improve the chance of success.

**Total Parenteral Nutrition (TPN)** is administered via a peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC) or via a central venous catheter (CVC). TPN has been shown to be an effective method of nutritional support in women with HG with a single non-randomised study reporting a decrease in perinatal mortality (190). However, TPN is expensive, often requiring admission for the duration of therapy, and is associated with complications including pneumothorax, venous thromboembolism and sepsis (182, 191). One series of 85 pregnancies associated with CVC placement demonstrated a 25% rate of catheter-associated complications, principally infection and venous thrombosis (192). Retrospective studies of pregnancies affected by NVP and managed with PICC line insertion describe complication rates between 17 and 66%. These complications include line sepsis, cellulitis, mechanical line failure, pain, and both superficial and deep vein thromboses (182, 192-195). This complication rate is higher than those of non-pregnant individuals (20-26%) and may well be associated with the altered immune function and hypercoagulable state of pregnancy (193). TPN administration is also associated with refeeding syndrome leading to further derangements in electrolyte status (196).

As TPN is a high-risk intervention, it should be used a last resort in cases refractory to all other attempts at caloric supplementation. Enteral nutrition is recommended as first line in supplemental feeding. Maternal admission throughout the duration of TPN therapy is necessary whilst those who are enterally fed may be able to continue their treatment at home. Multidisciplinary team involvement and the use of strict protocols with careful monitoring in the care of these women is important (6).

**Refeeding syndrome** refers to abnormalities in electrolytes and micronutrients that occur shortly after recommencement of feeding in patients who are malnourished. Hypophosphatemia is the predominant feature, but hypokalemia and hypomagnesemia can occur in response to increased cellular uptake of these nutrients. This can result in multi-organ effects including cardiac, neurological and musculoskeletal dysfunction. Thiamine deficiency can result in Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome precipitated by refeeding (196). Patients commencing enteral or parenteral nutrition are at high risk of refeeding syndrome and need to be monitored closely, with a slow introduction of supplementation.

Due to their associated complications, cost burden and high rates of patient dissatisfaction, the use of enteral and parenteral nutrition should be a last resort and trialled only if women are failing to respond to oral feeding and antiemetic therapy. Enteral nutrition would preferentially be recommended over TPN [LOE- III].

# When should termination of pregnancy be considered for NVP or HG?

For some women, termination of pregnancy is an appropriate therapy. Occasionally, failure of response to comprehensive treatment of HG may be life threatening, and in this instance, termination of pregnancy may be the only option for prolongation of the woman's life. In a survey of women by a United Kingdom–registered HG charity, 25.5% of women with previous HG self-reported reported occasional suicidal ideation and 6.6% reported regular suicidal ideation owing to severe sickness (197). In less severe cases, a decision for termination of pregnancy may be made after comprehensive management, including anti-emetics and corticosteroids have been trialled and the option of enteral or parenteral feeding has been considered. This management should include appropriate psychiatric and psychological care and support in a multidisciplinary environment. Failure of therapy should be clearly documented prior to consideration of medically-indicated termination of pregnancy (198, 199).

In a recent Study based on Registry linkage studies in a large Finnish cohort, HG sufferers gave birth to fewer children than unaffected women: 1.6 births/woman versus 1.8 births/ ( p < 0.0001) and pregnancy terminations were more common, 0.15 versus 0.11/woman (p < 0.0001) (200). As discussed below, HG and its treatment has significant impacts on quality of life. The ability to maintain day to day activities, work capacity, and the desire to have future pregnancies is impacted. The more severe the symptoms, the greater the impact on health-related quality of life, and the higher the risk of depression (201). Elective terminations of pregnancy have been reported in the literature in women who report severe vomiting and weight loss, depressive symptoms, family strain and lack of support from partners, and who feel they have been undertreated by their medical team (202).

A recent cross-sectional, population-based study measuring severity of NVP using the PUQE-24 score and assessing global quality of life using the Quality of Life Scale (QOLS) demonstrated a significant association of severe NVP with impaired ability to engage domestically, occupationally and socially (3). Seventy five per cent of women with severe symptoms considered not getting pregnant again, and 27% considered termination of their pregnancy due to HG.

A Canadian retrospective review of women with NVP who had terminated pregnancies due to HG reported unplanned pregnancy, multiparity and feelings of depression as independent factors associated with termination of pregnancy (203). In addition, severity of symptoms and adverse effects on the relationship to the partner were risk factors for consideration of termination. Similarly, in a review of 808 women, 123 of whom had undergone termination of pregnancy, a number cited inability to care for the family and self, and fear of fetal death or abnormality as their motivation for termination (198). Of concern, 52% reported their health care providers were uncaring, and 24% reported them to underestimate how sick these women were. In the UK HG Foundation survey, 249 of 4994 of respondents had terminated a pregnancy and 52.1% considered termination owing to HG (197). In the MOTHER study cohort, 23% of the women who did have a subsequent pregnancy reported considering termination although only 1 of the 35 proceeded (204).

The physical and psychological burden of HG on women must not be underestimated, and further education within the health care community is essential. Comprehensive management, including anti-emetics, corticosteroids, nutritional support, and both psychiatric and psychological support in a multidisciplinary environment should be undertaken prior to consideration of termination of pregnancy (198, 199) [LOE- III].

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# How should NVP/HG-associated gestational hyperthyroxinemia be managed?

It comes as no surprise that constant nausea or vomiting in pregnancy is depressing and reduces a woman's quality of life (69, 205, 206). It impairs her ability to function normally on a daily basis, impacts upon her relationships and can be impoverishing if the woman is unable to work. The more severe the vomiting, the greater the impact upon her quality of life (69).

Reluctance of health professionals to recognise and treat NVP and HG can worsen a woman's physical and mental health (197, 207-209). Erroneous beliefs around the dangers of treatment can delay necessary and occasionally life-saving treatment for women with hyperemesis.

Historical beliefs of a psychogenic etiology for NVP (202) have been disputed (6). There is no prospective study of women with a mental health appraisal prior to, and then, during pregnancy. All studies analysing mental health and NVP have been conducted once women were pregnant and symptomatic, so rely upon retrospective reporting of mental health (210).

It is however, clear that like many other studies reported below, women with severe NVP had greater levels of depression whilst experiencing those symptoms. In a cohort study of 648 Canadian women interviewed at a median of 17 and 30 weeks of gestation, NVP was prevalent at both gestations (32). Using the Cambridge Worry Scale and the Edinburgh Depression Scale (EDS), worsening symptoms were associated with worsening depression and anxiety. In this study a self-reported history of pre-pregnancy depression (not necessarily medicated) was not associated with a higher risk of severe NVP. The importance of social support was outlined, having the support of at least three different people was protective against NVP.

Women who experience HG become more frequently depressed than those who do not experience HG (210). The longer and the more severe the HG, the longer the depression. In the Norwegian mother and child cohort of 92,947 women studied, 851 women (0.9%) experienced hyperemesis and these women were more likely to report emotional distress (211). However, by 18 months post-partum

their levels of emotional distress matched those of the general population. The Dutch generation R study of approximately 7,000 women followed through pregnancy and analysed with a Health-Related Quality of Life questionnaire, found those who suffered with worse NVP had a poorer quality of life (69). A Turkish study excluding all women with a prior history of mental illness, found 54% of 78 women with HG suffered from a moderate or severe depressive disorder compared with 6% of pregnant women without NVP (212).

In most maternity units in Australia and New Zealand, routine mental health screening is undertaken with a minimum of an EDS and for the majority of pregnant women this may be sufficient. Due to the high reported rates of mental ill-health in women with HG or severe NVP, we recommend they should be screened at first presentation and this should be repeated as indicated, particularly if symptoms are severe and prolonged [LOE- III]. Social isolation is a major risk factor. Social work review and support should be considered where indicated. Support from family members and friends, both practical and emotional, may be very helpful (207).

A large population study in the UK assessed more than 8 million pregnancies and examined the hospital records of more than 180,000 hospital admissions for HG (44). HG accounted for 25,000 hospital admissions per year Contrary to other studies on NVP, socioeconomic deprivation as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation was found to be inversely related to admission for HG.

HG has a substantial financial impact upon the individual and upon the economy (213).

# How should NVP/HG-associated gestational hyperthyroxinemia be managed?

Gestational hyperthyroxinemia (GHT), gestational transient thyrotoxicosis or gestational hyperthyroidism is a transient biochemical thyrotoxicosis, which develops in early pregnancy and resolves before 20 weeks gestation (214) . Women do not always have overt signs of hyperthyroidism, and, by definition, have negative thyroid receptor antibodies. It occurs in approximately 1-3% of women in early pregnancy because placental human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) is structurally similar to Thyroid Stimulating Hormone (TSH) and can directly stimulate the TSH receptor, increasing thyroid hormone production and suppressing serum TSH (214, 215). In ~50% of cases, gestational hyperthyroidism occurs with HG (216). This stimulatory effect of hCG is usually mild and short lived.

In the majority of prospective comparative studies, women with HG were more likely to have an elevated free thyroxine (T4) (9 of 13 studies) and lower TSH (8 of 15 studies) but the incidence of GHT has been highly variable between studies (217). Goldman and Mestman described an incidence of GHT of between 30 and 73% and related the risk to the severity of HG, ethnicity (with South Asian women having a greater risk) and a history of Graves' disease (218). More recently, a large observational study from the Netherlands of hospitalised women with HG demonstrated a 9.8% rate of GHT (12/215 subjects) (219). In this study, there was no consistent association between levels of TSH or free T4 and severity or course of HG. The increased incidence of GHT seen in women with HG may be due to higher levels of circulating hCG, the production of altered forms of hCG with increased potency to stimulate the TSH receptor and/or hypersensitive TSH receptors more easily stimulated by hCG (217, 218, 220, 221). Some, but not all studies, have shown a positive correlation between hCG levels, the severity of vomiting and the degree of thyroid stimulation but in general, hyperthyroidism resolves as hCG and vomiting decline, usually in the early second trimester (Figure 3) (217, 220, 222-224).

Other conditions with elevated hCG levels and hyperthyroxinemia include multiple gestation, hydatidiform mole and choriocarcinoma. These are also characterized by an increased risk of HG (218, 225, 226).
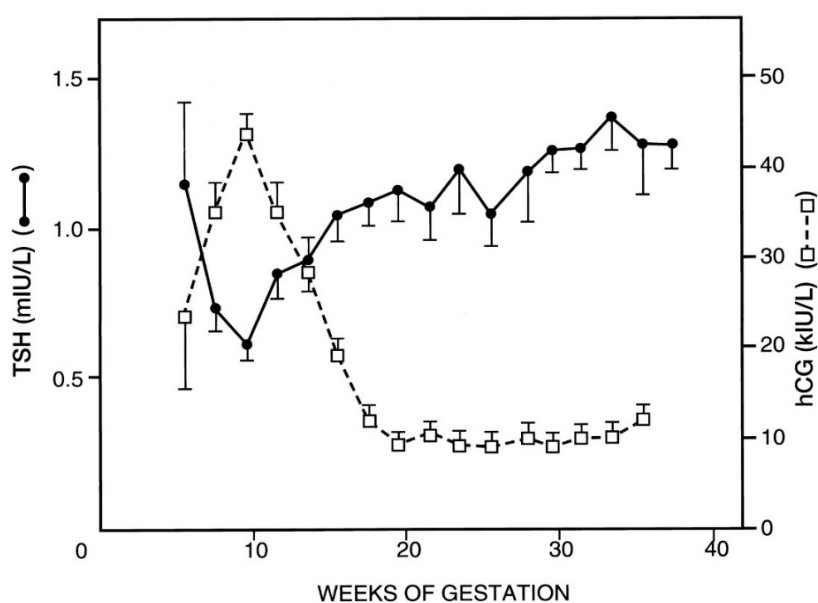


**Figure 3:** TSH and hCG levels as pregnancy progresses (Reproduced under CC-BY NC) (227)

There is disagreement as to which thyroid function tests (TFTs), if any, should be measured in women with HG or NVP. Some guidelines suggest all women with HG should have TFTs (228), whilst others recommend just checking TSH (214), or only testing when clinical features of overt hyperthyroidism are also present (82) or if women are refractory to treatment for HG (6, 45, 82). If clinical features of thyrotoxicosis are present, the rationale for testing thyroid function is to distinguish GHT from other causes of overt hyperthyroidism, which may require specific treatment and fetal monitoring due to potential adverse maternal and fetal outcomes (229). Autoimmune Graves' disease is the most common alternative cause of hyperthyroidism in women with HG, diagnosed in 11% in one study (230).

In pregnancy, measurement of TSH varies slightly but not significantly with different methods of analysis (214). Measurement of TSH only, with reference to trimester specific normal ranges, is a highly sensitive and reproducible screening test for potential thyrotoxicosis. Any subnormal serum

TSH value should be evaluated in conjunction with serum free T4 and T3 values. If abnormal thyroid function is detected, further thyroid assessment should be guided by clinical consideration of alternate causes. Table 8 outlines clinical and diagnostic features which distinguish between GHT and the most common other causes of hyperthyroidism.

Management of GHT associated with HG is supportive only, with appropriate treatment of the HG (214, 228). All current guidelines agree that anti-thyroid medication is not indicated as GHT is self-limiting and does not impact specifically on maternal or pregnancy/fetal outcomes (6, 45, 82, 214, 228, 229). TFTs can be rechecked after resolution of the HG or around 16-20 weeks gestation, to confirm that TSH has returned to normal. TSH suppression persisting beyond 20 weeks gestation may indicate another cause of hyperthyroidism, which will require investigation.

| | Gestational hyperthyroxinemia | Graves' disease | Thyroiditis: autoimmune or viral | Toxic goiter: multinodular or adenoma | Iatrogenic or factitious use of thyroxine |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Distinguishing Symptoms** | | | | | |
| **Associated vomiting** | Yes | | | | |
| **History of prior thyroid disease** | | Variable | | Goitre or known nodule may predate pregnancy | Possible history of indication for thyroxine |
| **Clinical symptoms of hyperthyroidism prior to pregnancy** | | Yes | Variable | Variable | Variable |
| **Distinguishing Signs** | | | | | |
| **Goitre** | No | Variable | Variable | Yes, with nodularity | No |
| **Ophthalmopathy** | Rarely lid lag, stare | Lid lag , stare proptosis and/or periorbital edema | Rarely lid lag, stare | Rarely lid lag, stare | Rarely lid lag, stare |
| **Dermopathy** | No | Rarely | No | No | No |
| **Investigations** | | | | | |
| **TSH receptor antibody positive** | No | Yes | No | No | No |
| **Thyroid peroxidase antibody (TPOAb)*** | Usually negative | Variable | Majority | No | Variable |
| **Other investigations†** | | | | Thyroid ultrasound | |
| **Duration of TSH suppression** | < 20 weeks gestation | Variable but may also improve by 16 weeks | Variable | Variable | Variable |

**Table 8:** Clinical and diagnostic features, which distinguish between GHT and the most common other causes of hyperthyroidism

Based on this information, this Guideline recommends the following:
- Do not measure TFTs in women with nausea and vomiting of pregnancy and no diagnostic criteria for HG.
- TSH should be measured in women with HG or NVP refractory to treatment, or in women with signs and/or symptoms of thyrotoxicosis.
  - o If TSH is below the normal gestational corrected reference range, the following additional investigations should be performed to exclude an alternate cause:
    - Repeat TSH, free T4, free T3
    - Thyroid antibodies including thyroid peroxidase and thyroid receptor
    - Thyroid Ultrasound if there is goitre, particularly with nodularity
- If an alternative cause for hyperthyroidism is suspected/confirmed, the woman should be referred to the appropriate specialists e.g. physician or endocrinologist, as well as a specialist obstetrician for ongoing assessment and management of thyroid disease during pregnancy and post-partum. Appropriate management of associated HG should continue.
- Management of women who have GHT is supportive with appropriate treatment of the HG; anti thyroid medications are not required. Specialist referral is not required.

# What impact does NVP and HG have on pregnancy and neonatal outcome?

## Pregnancy Outcomes

HG was once associated with increased maternal mortality, however, with improved access to parenteral and enteral nutrition this is now uncommon. From 2012-2016, there were six internationally reported maternal deaths related to complications from HG (231). The reported sequelae of HG are now rare but included Wernicke's encephalopathy (vitamin B1 deficiency), bleeding diathesis (vitamin K deficiency), acute kidney injury, splenic avulsion, oesophageal rupture, pneumo-mediastinum and rhabdomyolysis (232-234). With current practice, severe cases of HG are more commonly associated with nutritional and electrolyte disturbance requiring intravenous hydration and electrolyte replacement, enteral feeding or total parental nutrition.

In a prospective study of women reporting exposure to ondansetron or metoclopramide, the miscarriage rate was lower than in non-exposed women (112). In another study of women receiving a prescription for ondansetron or comparator antiemetics (metoclopramide or promethazine) (n=2677) during the first 20 weeks of pregnancy, there was no increased risk of preterm birth, hypertensive complications or stillbirth (235). Most recently, a large multinational cohort study of women using antiemetics, there was no significant increase in spontaneous abortion (0.82 [0.64-1.04] or stillbirth (0.97 [0.79-1.20] (110).

The debilitating nature of the symptoms and the intensive therapies required have significant personal and economic impacts for expectant mothers and therefore significantly influence emotional and psychological wellbeing (52). This is highlighted by the fact that in an international survey of women with a history of HG, 15% reported having at least one elective termination of pregnancy because of the condition, with the most common reasoning being 'no hope of relief' (197).

## Post-partum and future health

One study of women with HG, recruited from an internet website, assessed post-partum outcomes (236). They described high levels of post-traumatic stress syndrome, assessed by questionnaire, with several associated negative outcomes including inability to breastfeed, marital problems, financial problems and inability to self-care. A recent prospective cohort study examining risk factors for breast cancer has demonstrated that a history of HG increases the risk of HER-2 enriched breast cancers (HR 1.76 [1.07–2.87]) (237). A single case-control study has suggested having ever been treated for NVP was associated with an increased risk of breast cancer, especially in women experiencing recent pregnancies (OR 2.03 [1.05-3.92]) (238).

## Neonatal Outcomes

A 2023 meta-analysis of the impact of HG and severe NVP on perinatal outcomes included 61 studies and over 20,000 participants (239). HG was associated with an increased risk of preterm birth < 34 weeks (OR 2.81 [1.69–4.67], birth weight < 1500 g (OR 1.43 [1.02–1.99]), requirement for neonatal resuscitation (OR 1.07 [1.05–1.10] ), neonatal intensive care unit admission (OR 1.20 [1.14–1.26]) and placental abruption (OR 1.15 [1.05–1.25]). They described significantly lower birth weight after severe HG in comparison to mild HG with a mean difference of 104.29g. There was a reduction in birthweight > 4000 g (OR 0.74 [0.72–0.76]) and stillbirth (OR 0.92 [0.85–0.99]). There was no association with reduced Apgar scores, fetal loss or perinatal/neonatal deaths . Moberg et al also performed a systematic review and meta-analysis and described an increased risk for preeclampsia (OR 1.18 [ 1.03-1.35]), delivery before 37 weeks (OR 1.35 [1.13-1.61]), birth weight <10th centile (OR 1.24 [1.13-1.35]) and low birth weight <2500g (OR 1.35 [1.26-1.44]) (240). They once again demonstrated a higher fetal female/male ratio [OR 1.36 [1.15-1.60]). However, they stressed that the certainty of evidence was very low .

A previous systematic review demonstrated that NVP is associated with a favourable effect on the rate of miscarriage, congenital malformations, prematurity and childhood performance intelligence quotient (IQ) (241). In a recent prospective study of women with previous early pregnancy loss, there was a reduced risk of clinical pregnancy loss for women with nausea alone (OR 0.20 [0.09-0.44]) or NVP (OR 0.44 [0.26-0.74]), even after adjustment for the covariates of age, parity, smoking status and karyotype (242). The Norwegian Mother and Child Cohort has shown adverse pregnancy outcomes in women with NVP, or nausea without vomiting, including increased odds for pelvic girdle pain and proteinuria, whilst women with NVP also had increased risk of high blood pressure and preeclampsia (243). The authors themselves stressed that in most cases the hypertension was borderline only. However, the women with NVP had significantly higher rates of these complications in previous pregnancies as well. Conversely, in the same study, the women with nausea in pregnancy had a lower incidence of preterm births, birth via emergency caesarean delivery, low birth weight or a small for gestational age (SGA) newborn and had lower odds of an Apgar score <7 at birth. A more recent cohort study specifically investigated the relationship between vomiting, not treated with anti-emetics, and birth weight (244). In contrast to the Norwegian Mother and Child Cohort study that included women who obtained treatment for NP and NVP, this study demonstrated a significant association between low birth weight and untreated vomiting in pregnancy (OR 3.5, p = 0.03) (244).

HG, in contrast, has been associated with placental dysfunction. A 2011 meta-analysis concluded that women with HG were more likely to have a small baby (low birth weight OR 1.42 [1.27–1.58], SGA OR 1.28 [1.02–1.60]) or a baby born preterm (OR 1.32 [1.04–1.68]) (245). In a Norwegian study of 892 women hospitalised for HG, inadequate weight gain in the first trimester and failure to achieve pre-pregnancy weight by week 13–18 was an independent predictor of SGA (246) . Another study has revealed that women admitted with HG in the second trimester have twice the risk of preterm preeclampsia (OR 2.09 [1.38–3.16]), a threefold increased risk of placental abruption (OR 3.07 [1.88–5.00]) and an increased risk of an SGA newborn (1.39 [1.06–1.83]) (247). It is unclear whether HG is associated with an increased risk of stillbirth (245, 248). There are limited long term follow-up studies of the offspring of pregnancies with HG but newer evidence suggests they may have an increased risk of impaired insulin sensitivity in childhood (p=0.01) which may translate into an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, hypertension and heart disease in later life (249). One long term neurodevelopmental study compared the cognitive abilities of children born to mothers hospitalised with severe HG with those managed as outpatients for milder NVP (250). Children of hospitalised mothers had significantly lower median scores on verbal (p = 0.04), performance (p = 0.03) and full-scale IQ (p = 0.05). Duration of hospitalization, maternal depression, and maternal IQ were significant predictors of these outcomes emphasising the potential benefit of appropriate management with holistic care including psychosocial support.

# What is the recurrence risk of NVP and HG?

As NVP is such a common symptom, the risk of recurrence is very high. Klebanoff et al reported recurrence rates of 54-83% (251). The risk of recurrent HG is more difficult to quantify. In a large cohort study based on data from the Medical Birth Registry of Norway, 1967–1998, the risk of hyperemesis was 15% in the second pregnancy in women with and 0.7% in women without previous HG (OR 26.4 [24.2, 28.7]) (252). In the UK study of Fiaschi, of those women admitted to hospital with HG in one pregnancy, 26% had an admission for HG in their subsequent pregnancy (44). However, admitted patients may not reflect the broad spectrum of women with HG. A systematic review of published data confirmed significant methodological problems with assessing recurrence risk and demonstrated rates between 15 and 81% (253). In a follow up study of the MOTHER cohort, of the 215 women who originally participated, 73 women self-reported there subsequent pregnancy decisions (204). Following the index pregnancy, 38 women (52%) did not have another pregnancy, and two-thirds of them stated that this was because of HG . Thirty-five women conceived one or more times and HG recurred in 88.6% of subsequent pregnancies.

In a study of the use of antiemetics in pregnancy, the overall prescription-fill rate for antiemetics was 7.6% (252). In women who had previously used antiemetics in their first pregnancy, the prescription fill rate in a second pregnancy was 35.5% and 53.5% for women who filled antiemetic prescriptions in the previous 2 pregnancies . Women who filled an antiemetic prescription in their first pregnancy were less likely to have subsequent pregnancies than women who did not fill an antiemetic prescription in their first pregnancy (OR 0.93 [0.90-0.96]).

This unwillingness of some women to consider another pregnancy was also demonstrated by the survey results of 100 women with one pregnancy affected by HG, recruited from a website sponsored by the Hyperemesis Education and Research Foundation (254). Although potentially a selected group of women, 37% responded that they were unwilling to become pregnant because of their experience of HG, whilst 57% had a further pregnancy. Of these, 81% had recurrent severe NVP and only 11% had no NVP.

# What is the role of preconceptual counselling for NVP and HG?

In cases of subsequent pregnancy, early or even pre-emptive commencement of antiemetic therapy gives both physical and emotional relief for women who have previously experienced severe NVP or HG (255) [LOE-II]. One older study has suggested that a periconceptual multivitamin and mineral preparation commenced one month prior to planned conception, resulted in a reduced incidence of NVP (3.4 v 7.4% p<0.01) (256) [LOE-II].

Although there is no trial data to inform this area of practice, preconceptual counselling can provide information and reassurance to a woman previously affected by NVP or HG. It also allows planning for early, effective management if symptoms of NVP or HG occur.

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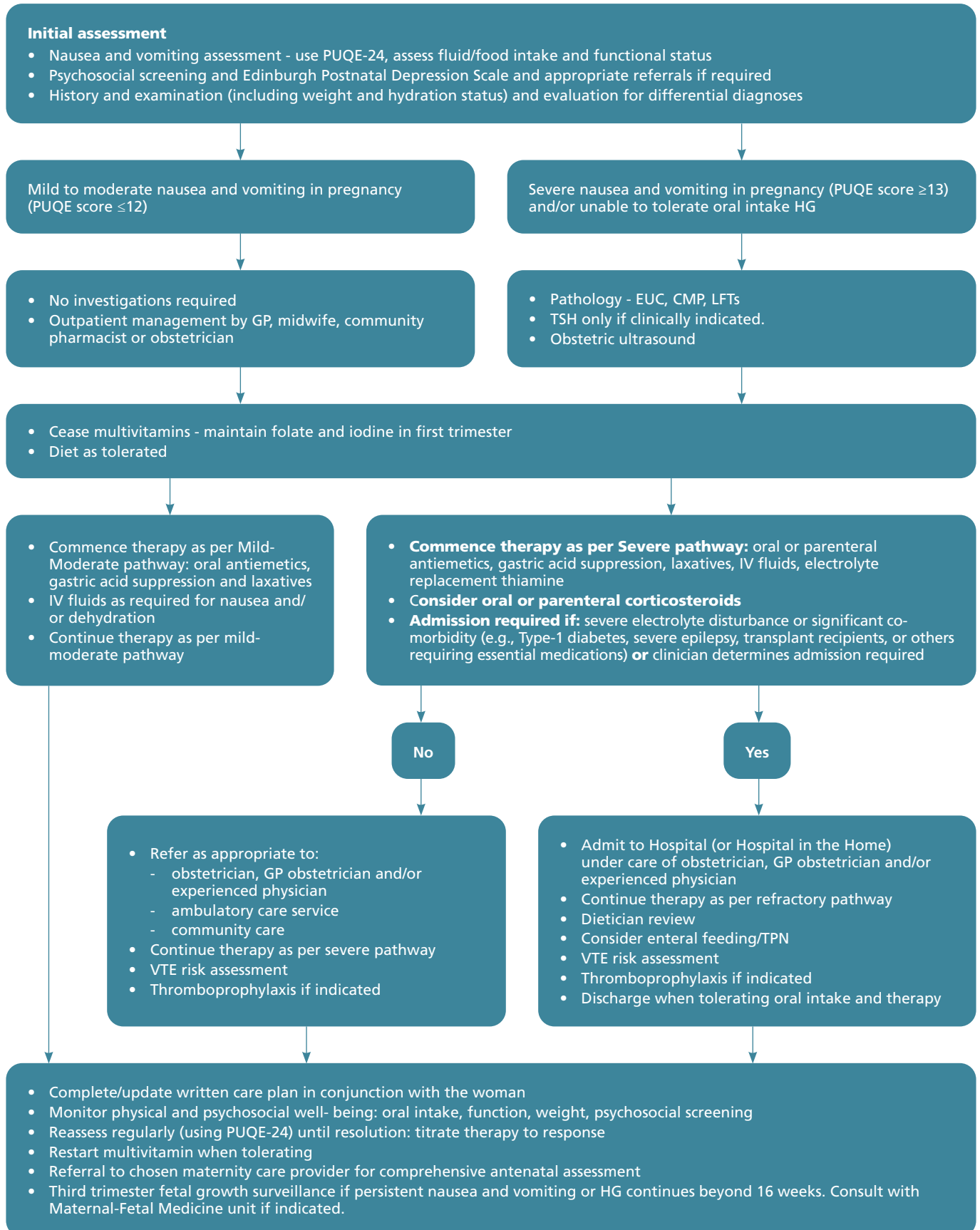
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# SOMANZ Management of NVP/HG (Part 1)

**Initial assessment**
- Nausea and vomiting assessment - use PUQE-24, assess fluid/food intake and functional status
- Psychosocial screening and Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale and appropriate referrals if required
- History and examination (including weight and hydration status) and evaluation for differential diagnoses

**Mild to moderate nausea and vomiting in pregnancy (PUQE score ≤12)**

**Severe nausea and vomiting in pregnancy (PUQE score ≥13) and/or unable to tolerate oral intake HG**

- No investigations required
- Outpatient management by GP, midwife, community pharmacist or obstetrician

- Pathology - EUC, CMP, LFTs
- TSH only if clinically indicated.
- Obstetric ultrasound

- Cease multivitamins - maintain folate and iodine in first trimester
- Diet as tolerated

- Commence therapy as per Mild-Moderate pathway: oral antiemetics, gastric acid suppression and laxatives
- IV fluids as required for nausea and/or dehydration
- Continue therapy as per mild-moderate pathway

- **Commence therapy as per Severe pathway:** oral or parenteral antiemetics, gastric acid suppression, laxatives, IV fluids, electrolyte replacement thiamine
- C**onsider oral or parenteral corticosteroids**
- **Admission required if:** severe electrolyte disturbance or significant co-morbidity (e.g., Type-1 diabetes, severe epilepsy, transplant recipients, or others requiring essential medications) **or** clinician determines admission required

**No**

**Yes**

- Refer as appropriate to:
  - obstetrician, GP obstetrician and/or experienced physician
  - ambulatory care service
  - community care
- Continue therapy as per severe pathway
- VTE risk assessment
- Thromboprophylaxis if indicated

- Admit to Hospital (or Hospital in the Home) under care of obstetrician, GP obstetrician and/or experienced physician
- Continue therapy as per refractory pathway
- Dietician review
- Consider enteral feeding/TPN
- VTE risk assessment
- Thromboprophylaxis if indicated
- Discharge when tolerating oral intake and therapy

- Complete/update written care plan in conjunction with the woman
- Monitor physical and psychosocial well- being: oral intake, function, weight, psychosocial screening
- Reassess regularly (using PUQE-24) until resolution: titrate therapy to response
- Restart multivitamin when tolerating
- Referral to chosen maternity care provider for comprehensive antenatal assessment
- Third trimester fetal growth surveillance if persistent nausea and vomiting or HG continues beyond 16 weeks. Consult with Maternal-Fetal Medicine unit if indicated.

| | Mild PUQE-24 ≤ | Moderate PUQE-24 = 7 to 12 | Severe (PUQE-24 ≥13) and/or inadequate oral intake or hyperemesis gravidarum – Outpatient management | Refractory symptoms or in hospital |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Antiemetics and corticosteroids** | • ginger **and/or** • pyridoxine (vitamin B6) | One of the following: • doxylamine (plus pyridoxine) • cyclizine • metoclopramide • prochlorperazine • diphenhydramine • promethazine **or** • ondansetron (plus laxative/s) | • ondansetron (plus laxative/s) **Add additional antiemetics as required especially for night-time dosing:** • doxylamine (plus pyridoxine) **or** • cyclizine **or** • metoclopramide **or** • prochlorperazine **or** • diphenhydramine **or** • prochlorperazine **If significant symptoms persist:** • consider corticosteroids: Oral: prednisone/prednisolone **or** IV: methylprednisolone **or** hydrocortisone • consider droperidol | As for severe nausea and vomiting in pregnancy or hyperemesis gravidarum Convert to parenteral treatment if not tolerating oral Convert back to oral equivalent when suitable |
| **Laxatives** | | Docusate 120mg oral once or twice a day once or twice a day and/or macrogol oral once or twice a day and/or lactulose 15 to 30mL oral once or twice a day |
| **Acid suppression** | - | One of the following: H2 antagonist: famotidine, nizatidine **or** Proton pump inhibitor: esomeprazole, rabeprazole, omeprazole, lansoprazole | Cease H2 antagonist and commence proton pump inhibitor **or** Increase dose of proton pump inhibitor: Esomeprazole, rabeprazole, omeprazole, lansoprazole | Continue proton pump inhibitor IV if oral not tolerated: • esomeprazole, pantoprazole, omeprazole |
| **Intravenous (IV) therapy** | - | - | IV fluids 1 to 3 times per week as required Add IV thiamine if poor oral intake or administering glucose | Continuous IV fluid and electrolyte replacement - add IV thiamine if poor oral intake or administering glucose |
| **Additional therapies** | - | - | Consider enteral nutrition VTE risk assessment and prophylaxis if indicated | Consider enteral or total parenteral nutrition VTE risk assessment and prophylaxis if indicated |

# Sickness and Vomiting in Pregnancy
## Patient Information

Many pregnant women feel sick (nausea) or vomit during early pregnancy. This can vary from mild when it can be considered a normal part of pregnancy. If you can continue to eat and drink even with sickness, this is considered reasonably normal. The exact cause of the sickness is not known but is probably due to the hormonal changes of early pregnancy.

It can occur more commonly in some families (genetic tendency), if you have twins or triplets, if your baby is a girl and if you had sickness and vomiting in your previous pregnancies. We don't really understand why some women suffer more, but the most important thing to know is that it's not your fault and it doesn't mean there is anything wrong with your pregnancy.

In this leaflet we answer some common questions about nausea and vomiting in pregnancy and provide some guidance for where you can get more information and help if you need it.

Although it is often called morning sickness, symptoms can occur at any time - not just in the morning. It usually starts from the early part of pregnancy and settles between 12 and 16 weeks. Rarely, women have some sickness throughout their entire pregnancy.

Even mild sickness and vomiting in pregnancy can be difficult to cope with. It can affect your mood, your work, your home situation and your ability to care for your family. If sickness and vomiting really interfering with your life, particularly your ability to eat and drink, you should seek help from your doctor or midwife.

## What is hyperemesis gravidarum?

If you have severe sickness and vomiting for more than a few days, you may find it hard to drink anything leading to dehydration (lack of fluid in your body) and difficulty eating enough food, causing weight loss and vitamin deficiencies. This severe sickness and vomiting in pregnancy is known as **hyperemesis gravidarum (HG).**

If you have these symptoms, even for more than a few days, you need urgent, expert medical help. Treatment is effective and protects you and your baby from complications. You should see your family doctor (GP), obstetrician or attend the Emergency Room at your local hospital for advice and help.

## Do sickness and vomiting affect the baby?

Not usually. The baby gets nourishment from your body's reserves even though you may not eat well when you are vomiting. The effort of retching and vomiting does not harm your baby. In fact, some studies have shown that having sickness and vomiting in early pregnancy is a good indication that your pregnancy is healthy and will have a successful outcome.

Your baby may be affected if you develop hyperemesis gravidarum and become very ill with lack of fluid in the body (dehydration) which is not treated. In this case, the most likely problem is that your baby will have a low birth weight when he or she is born. However, not all babies born to women with hyperemesis gravidarum have a low birth weight.

## Do I need any special tests?

If you have mild feelings of sickness (nausea) and vomiting during pregnancy, you do not usually need any specific tests or investigations.

Sometimes your doctor or midwife will suggest some tests:

- If your symptoms become more severe.
- If you are not able to keep any food or fluids down.
- If you start losing weight.

Investigations may include blood or urine tests to look for another cause for your nausea and vomiting or to check how your body is coping.

## What can I do to help relieve sickness and vomiting?

In most cases, as the symptoms are often mild, no specific treatment is needed. However, there are certain things that you may like to try to help relieve your symptoms. They include the following:

- **Eating small but frequent meals** may help. Some people say that sickness is made worse by not eating anything at all. If you eat some food regularly, it may help to ease symptoms. Eat whatever you can, when you can. Don't worry too much about a balanced diet at this time. There may be some foods you really want and others you can't stand. Cold meals may be better if nausea is associated with food smells.

- **Ginger.** Some studies have shown that taking ginger tablets or syrup may be effective for relieving feelings of sickness (nausea) and vomiting in pregnancy. However, care should be taken, as the quality of ginger products varies. Before you take a ginger product, you should discuss this with a pharmacist, midwife or GP. Food containing ginger may also help.
- **Avoiding triggers.** Some women find that a trigger can set off the sickness. For example, a smell or emotional stress. If possible, avoid anything that may trigger your symptoms.
- **Having lots to drink** to avoid lack of fluid in the body (dehydration) may help. Drinking little and often rather than large amounts may help to prevent vomiting. Try to aim to drink at least one to two litres of some sort of fluid each day.
- **Rest.** Make sure that you have plenty of rest and sleep in early pregnancy. Being tired is thought to make nausea and vomiting during pregnancy worse.
- **Acupressure or seasickness bands** on your wrists may be helpful. These can be bought at your local pharmacy.

**Note:** Generally you should not use over-the-counter remedies for sickness and vomiting whilst you are pregnant unless recommended by your doctor, midwife or pharmacist.

## When are anti-sickness medicines needed?

Anti-sickness medicine may be necessary and recommended if your symptoms are persistent and severe, or do not settle with the above measures. Although it is generally recommended to avoid medicines when you are pregnant, certain medicines have been used for a number of years to treat feelings of sickness and vomiting in pregnancy and are considered safe. Some of the more commonly used medicines are pyridoxine (vitamin B6), doxylamine, promethazine, cyclizine and prochlorperazine and there is no evidence that they harm a developing baby. If these are not helpful, metoclopramide or ondansetron, may be prescribed. Medicines that lower stomach acid and stop acid coming into your throat and mouth are often recommended if you have more severe sickness. For women with hyperemesis gravidarum, sometimes prednisolone may be used.

Always discuss with your doctor, community pharmacist or midwife before taking an anti-sickness medicine when you are pregnant.

They should inform you about any possible concerns regarding using medicines for sickness and vomiting during pregnancy. Feel free to ask them any questions you have before taking medicine in pregnancy.

It is best to use medication for the shortest time possible. For some women, medication may be needed for several weeks or even months until symptoms settle.

## What if these treatments do not work very well?

A small number of women need to be seen at the hospital or Day Hospital facility to be given fluids by a drip. Admission to Hospital is sometimes needed if you do not respond to medication or can't keep it down. You may need to be admitted to hospital if you lose weight or can't keep enough fluid down and become too dry (dehydrated).

## Other causes of vomiting

Remember, not all vomiting may be due to the pregnancy. You can still get other illnesses such as a tummy bug (gastroenteritis) or food poisoning. Sometimes a bladder or kidney infection can cause vomiting in pregnancy. You should see a doctor urgently if you develop any symptoms that you are worried about, particularly any of the following symptoms:

- Very dark urine or not passing any urine for more than eight hours.
- Stomach pains.
- High temperature (fever).
- Pain on passing urine.
- Headache not responding to paracetamol.
- Runny stools (diarrhea).
- Yellow skin (jaundice).
- Severe weakness or feeling faint.
- Blood in your vomit.
- Repeated, unstoppable vomiting.

## Where can I get more information?

The following sites may be helpful if you want more information or support:

- SOMANZ Guideline for the management of nausea and vomiting in pregnancy.
  **https://www.somanz.org/content/uploads/2020/07/NVP-GUIDELINE-1.2.20-1.pdf**
- Hyperemesis Gravidarum Australia: **https://www.hyperemesisaustralia.org.au**
- HER Foundation **https://www.hyperemesis.org/**
- Pregnancy Sickness Support UK: **https://www.pregnancysicknesssupport.org.uk/**
- American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology: Morning Sickness: Nausea and Vomiting of Pregnancy:
  **https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Morning-Sickness-Nausea-and-Vomiting-of-Pregnancy**
- Expert advice about medicine use in pregnancy is available through various Women's hospitals or specific organisations such as Mothersafe NSW or the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS)

Various online forums and blogs are available for women to share their experiences. We cannot recommend individual sites as they do not contain supervised content.

# Sickness in Pregnancy Plan

Date:_____

Doctor:_____

Contact:_____

| Patient Label |
|---|

| My medications for sickness, vomiting and acid reflux | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Morning** | **Middle of Day** | **Evening** | **Bedtime** |
| **For sickness or dry heaves (nausea or vomiting or retching** | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| **For stomach acid (reflux)** | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| **For constipation** | | | | |
| | | | | |
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| **Other** | | | | |
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| | | | | |

**If you feel worse:**

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**If you feel better:**

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# Would you like to tell us how you're going?

**Eating and drinking:**

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**Work or study:**

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**Family:**

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**Mood:**

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**Did you have drip (IV) fluids this week? If so, when? Did it help?**

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