



Sea Sickness

Recognize: The key to effective prevention is to recognize and react to your earliest symptoms. Each person's pattern of symptom onset is somewhat different, but it is usually repeatable. Generally the first symptoms are yawning and drowsiness, then abnormal fatigue and lethargy, but if you already are tired from standing watch these symptoms can go unrecognized. For many people, the first obvious symptoms can go unrecognized. For many people, the first obvious are stomach awareness (which turns to nausea) and slight sweating.

As symptoms advance, stomach awareness turns to nausea, the face becomes pale, particularly around the nose and mouth, and hands and face become cold and clammy. Belching, salivating and flatulence are common. Concentration on mental tasks becomes difficult. Eventually nausea comes in waves, and increases in uncontrolled crescendo leading almost inevitably to vomiting. Subsequent attacks of vomiting typically develop with less warning than the first.

React: As soon as you notice you have symptoms, do something about it! Take an anti-motion sickness medication, if you haven't done so already. Go on deck to eliminate visual conflict, and stay amidships or aft where the total motion stimulus due to pitching and rolling is less severe. Use a technique called horizon viewing: Station yourself where you have a good, broad view of the motion. You needn't try to stare steadfastly at the horizon. It is fine to look around.

Ride The Waves: Don't sit or lie inert in the cockpit, leaning against the cabin or coaming, passively letting the motion toss you around. Postural anticipation of the boat's motion is the natural cure for seasickness. Use a method called riding: Sit upright, let your trunk and neck muscles keep your head and upper body balanced over your hips as the boat moves. Once you get the rhythm, it is far less tiring than fighting to hang on. If you feel well enough, stand up, walk around and develop your sea legs while you find some work to do.

Communicate: Let the skipper know that you have symptoms. Don't be embarrassed, experienced skippers know seasickness happens because most get seasick sometimes themselves. They know that even a small course change can change the amplitude and frequency of the boat's motion in the waves, often with miraculous results.

Go On Deck: To avoid visual conflicts, minimize the time you spend below, particularly if you are beginning to feel queasy. Wear clothing that is absorbent, easily ventilated and quickly removed. Err on the side of overdressing. It is easier to remove excess clothing on deck and hand it below than to go below yourself while sick. If necessary eat on deck.

Avoid Alcohol: Drink alcohol only in moderation. Alcohol has a direct effect on your vestibular system and depending on the degree of consumption you may be made to feel dizzy anytime you or the boat moves, especially with overindulgence. If you're hung over on the morning of departure from the previous evening's social events, chance are good that you will donate your breakfast to the ocean.

Eat Moderately: There isn't much strong scientific evidence indicating that susceptibility to seasickness is influenced by eating or avoiding certain foods, even though this idea is mentioned frequently in older textbooks. Feel free to eat moderate amount of whatever foods you find appealing.

Replace Nutrients: Sometime a case of seasickness is limited to a single episode of vomiting. However, particularly in heavy weather, repeated attacks of vomiting and retching ("dry heaves") are common. Vomiting brings temporary relief from nausea, but after several episodes, weaknesses, drowsiness and apathy typically result. Sufferers usually are able to respond physically to real emergencies for a day or so. However, if you vomit repeatedly and don't eat because you feel nauseous, eventually you will "hit the wall" and become weak, confused and eventually incapacitated. Your breath will smell like acetone. To prevent this, force yourself to eat and drink (broth, saltines and candy, for instance) frequently in small amounts. It won't all stay down, but your net loss of fluid, glucose and electrolyte due to vomiting will be much reduced.

Medications: Anti-motion sickness drugs are a very effective way of raising your threshold for seasickness and of hastening recovery if you do become sick. As shown in the accompanying table, a wide variety of useful drugs is available. The problem is that many sailors are reluctant to use them, usually because of concerns about side effects (e.g. drowsiness and blurred vision). Also, all oral drugs require at least a half-hour, usually more, to become effective. Many people try drugs but give up on them, simply because they failed to take them in time. Finding a drug that works for you is worthwhile. Before choosing or using any anti-motion sickness drug, consult with your own physician or pharmacist, someone who knows your medical history, who can prescribe the stronger drugs and suppositories and who can advise on the type and dosage you can take safely. Not all anti-motion sickness drugs are appropriate for use by children. Women who are, or might be, pregnant should avoid drugs entirely.

For more information please visit <http://www.marinemedical.com/articles/seasick.htm>