

What is a gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is an infection of the bowel (intestines) that causes diarrhoea and sometimes vomiting. It is common in infants and children. Diarrhoea and vomiting sometimes cause the loss of important fluids and minerals the body needs (dehydration).

What causes gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is more common in the winter and early spring. Viruses that get into the bowels (intestinal tract) usually cause diarrhoea and vomiting. Sometimes bacteria cause it. They are caused by putting dirty hands, toys or other objects into the mouth.

What are the symptoms of gastroenteritis?

The most common symptoms are:

- diarrhoea (frequent watery stools) usually lasting 2-7 days
- nausea and vomiting lasting 1-2 days
- abdominal/stomach pain
- fever

What can I do if my infant or child has gastroenteritis?

Usually, diarrhoea and vomiting last only a short time. Therefore, most children can be looked after at home.

What if my child has diarrhoea but is otherwise well?

No special drinks or treatments are needed. Feeding children normally will not make things worse and they may get better faster. Extra drinks will replace the fluid they are losing. Water flavoured with a little diluting fruit squash is probably best.

- Avoid giving natural fruit juices (aside from apple juice as below), fizzy drinks (even if “flat”), or sport drinks. Their high sugar content may make diarrhoea worse.
- If you are breast-feeding, continue to feed on demand but give extra drinks of cooled boiled water between breast feeds.
- If your infant is bottle-fed, continue feeding as usual with full-strength formula.
- Foods such as rice, potatoes, bread and cereals, lean meat, yoghurt, fruits and vegetables are best. Avoid sugary or fatty foods.

What if my child keeps vomiting?

Vomiting is a common early symptom of gastroenteritis. Most children with vomiting and diarrhoea can be treated at home with oral rehydration solutions (ORS) such as Dioralyte™ or Rehidrat™. You can also use diluted (half-strength)

fresh apple juice. The trick is to give very small volumes very frequently. For example, give 5mls every 5 minutes. If this is not tolerated because of vomiting, contact your doctor.

As the vomiting improves, you can increase the volume of ORS or apple juice you give and give it less often.

How long should I give my child ORS?

Generally after 4 hours, other fluids including milk and food can be given.

Are there any other special treatments?

No. Children who are dehydrated rarely refuse ORS. If you are worried, contact your doctor.

What treatments are not helpful?

Medicines to treat vomiting or diarrhoea are not necessary or helpful.

How can I treat nappy rash caused by diarrhoea?

- Generally avoid nappy wipes
- Cleanse the nappy area gently and thoroughly with soap and water; pat dry

Looking after your child with GASTROENTERITIS



Parent Factsheet
Royal Hospital for Children
Glasgow

- You **can't** get fluids into the child **and** the diarrhoea lasts longer than 24 hours
- You **can** get fluids into the child **but** diarrhoea lasts more than 7 to 10 days
- Your child continues to have excessive watery motions a day

Disclaimer:
The medical information provided in this factsheet is for educational purposes only. This information should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice from your doctor. You should always contact your doctor if you are worried about your child's health. Your own doctor may recommend other treatments based on your child's individual circumstances.

- Apply zinc-based nappy cream such as Sudocrem™ thickly after cleansing the bottom gently and thoroughly
- Wash your hands well after each nappy change

When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if you are worried that your child is becoming dehydrated. Sometimes vomiting, diarrhoea, fever and a loss of appetite can make your child lose more fluid than he or she can keep down. This may lead to dehydration. Signs or symptoms are:

- Dry mouth
- Sunken eyes
- Excessive thirst
- No urine in 8 to 12 hours or small amounts of dark urine
- More sleepy than with a routine illness
- No tears with the crying

Call your doctor if:

- Your baby is less than six months old
- Your child keeps vomiting (especially if green, brown or bloodied) and cannot keep fluids down
- Your child's stools or bowel motions contains blood