

Gastroenteritis

What is gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is the name for an infection in the stomach and intestine (bowels). Gastroenteritis can affect people of all ages and can cause vomiting or diarrhoea (or both). It may also cause tummy pain and a fever.

What causes gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is usually caused by viruses, and less commonly by bacteria or parasites. It may come from contaminated food or water, or from other people not washing their hands (this is especially important after going to the toilet, changing a nappy, or before food handling).

Children can become ill very quickly with gastroenteritis. Children, in particular babies, may dehydrate rapidly due to loss of fluids through diarrhoea and vomiting.

Treatment provided in the emergency department

Oral fluids are the best treatment for mild dehydration. Your child may have been treated in the emergency department using rehydration solution either by mouth, or through a nasogastric tube (tube placed into the nose that goes to the stomach).

Medicine to stop diarrhoea is not recommended, and antibiotics are rarely needed.

Fluids

While your child is unwell it is important to give regular drinks to prevent dehydration. This may be water, diluted fruit juice, or a rehydration solution.

Dilute clear apple juice (half water, half apple juice) is often used as the preferred rehydration solution in the emergency department and can be continued at home. Other rehydration solutions can be purchased from supermarkets or pharmacies (and can also come or be made into icy poles).

Drinks with lots of sugar (including standard fruit juices, sports drinks or energy drinks) should NOT be given as this may make diarrhoea worse.

If your child continues to vomit, give them small drinks often (for example, every 10-15 minutes). Using a syringe may help. As the vomiting settles, they can have more to drink less often. Your child should be drinking at least the amount suggested below while they are awake. If they want to drink more than this, then they can. If the vomiting or diarrhoea continues, they will need extra fluid to replace what they are losing while they are unwell.



If your child has received rehydration with a nasogastric tube while at the hospital, he or she may not drink well initially as they may not be thirsty.

Weight	Fluid per hour (while awake)
8 – 10 kg	40 – 50 ml
10 – 12.5 kg	50 – 60 ml
12.5 – 15 kg	60 – 75 ml
15 – 17.5 kg	75 - 90 ml
17.5 – 20 kg	90 – 100 ml
20 – 30 kg	100 ml
30 – 45 kg	125 ml

Food

- Do not starve your child.
- Breastfed babies should continue breastfeeding.
- Milk and formula are safe and should not be diluted. If you feel the milk is worsening their diarrhoea, you will need to see your doctor.
- Let your child eat what they normally eat. This could include rice, potatoes, bread, cereal, lean meats, yogurt, fruits and vegetables. However, avoid very sugary or sweet foods as this may make the diarrhoea worse.

When to see your doctor

- If your baby is less than 3 months old (as young babies can become ill very quickly).
- If your child is continually vomiting.
- If you are concerned about the number of watery stools (poo) being passed, or if the motions have blood in them.
- If your child is refusing to drink.
- If your child has bad tummy pain.

If your child has symptoms of dehydration such as:

- drowsiness or lethargy
- irritability
- dry mouth
- eyes look sunken
- decreased urine (wee) output
 - your child goes for 12 hours without passing urine
 - less than half their usual number of wet nappies
 - their urine is very dark and concentrated.

What to do

- As long as your child has diarrhoea and vomiting, keep them away from other children as much as possible, and home from school or childcare centres. It may take many days (even weeks) for their diarrhoea to settle.
- Wash your hands after you have been changing nappies or playing with your child.

- Teach your child to always wash their hands after going to the toilet.
- Change your baby's nappies frequently, and use a zinc based nappy cream – to stop the diarrhoea from irritating your baby's skin.

If you are concerned

Go to your local doctor or closest emergency department.



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