



West Cambridge Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine

575 Mount Auburn Street
Cambridge, MA 02138-4627
(P) 617-547-1995
(F) 617-492-1118

www.westcambridgepediatrics.com

Gastroenteritis is an illness that can cause nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea. Most such “stomach flus” in children are not serious, are caused by a common virus and are generally self-limited. In most cases home treatment will ease the symptoms, and generally the vomiting will stop after 12-24 hours though diarrhea may last for a few days or more. Treatment is aimed at avoiding dehydration while the body heals itself

How can you care for your child at home?

Do not give your child anything to eat or drink for about an hour after he or she has vomited. Give the stomach a chance to settle down!

Give your child 1 teaspoon (5ml) of water or an oral rehydration solution (ORS) such as Pedialyte every 15 minutes. If this is tolerated for an hour, increase the amount of fluid given and decrease the frequency, for example you can then give 2 teaspoons every 20 minutes. Remember, 3 teaspoons (15ml) given every 15 minutes is 2 ounces an hour. That adds up very quickly! Your child might want to take larger amounts, but it is important to proceed slowly.

After your child goes six hours without vomiting you can start giving them an easy-to-digest diet. We suggest starting with the BRAT diet (Bananas, Rice, Applesauce, Toast) or small amounts of unsweetened cereal (Rice Krispies or Cheerios). Avoid high-fiber foods, such as beans, and foods with a lot of sugar, such as candy or sweets. Dairy products can promote vomiting. Milk, cheese, ice cream and even yogurt are off the menu until the risk of vomiting is passed – usually 12-24hours. Apple, pear, and cherry juice, and other beverages with high sugar content, should be avoided. Sports drinks (e.g, Gatorade) should also be avoided since they have too much sugar and have inappropriate electrolyte levels.

Watch for signs of dehydration, which means the body has lost too much water. As your child becomes dehydrated, his or her mouth or eyes may feel very dry and they may lack energy and want to be held a lot. They may have a lack of tears when crying or have sunken eyes. Your child's urine will be darker, and he or she will not need to urinate as often as usual. If you notice these signs, please call our office.

Wash your hands after changing diapers and before you touch food. Have your child wash his or her hands after using the toilet and before eating. Do not give your child over-the-counter anti-diarrhea or upset-stomach medicines without talking to your doctor first. Make sure your child rests. Keep your child home as long as he or she has a fever, vomiting or diarrhea.

Infants: Babies become dehydrated far more easily than older children. Attention to the signs of dehydration is important – no tears, dry mouth, no wet diapers for more than 6-8 hours. With babies, vomiting should not be confused with spitting up. Vomiting is forceful and repeated, while spitting up usually occurs shortly after feeding, is effortless and causes no discomfort.

The general causes of gastroenteritis are the same in babies as in older children. However, food allergy or formula intolerance can cause vomiting and diarrhea. The threshold for calling (see below) the office is always lower when the patient is very young.

Don't feed your baby for about an hour after the last time that he or she has vomited.

If you are breast-feeding your child, continue to breast-feed, but try shorter and more frequent feeds. If a baby continues to vomit breast milk, give 1 teaspoon every 15 minutes of an oral rehydration solution (ORS), such as Pedialyte, with a dropper, spoon, or bottle for the first hour.

If you are formula feeding your child and they are vomiting, switch from formula to an ORS. Formula is usually more difficult for babies with gastroenteritis to digest and therefore, an ORS should be used at 1 teaspoon every 15 minutes for the first hour. Afterwards you can slowly increase how much of the ORS you offer your baby. When six hours have passed without vomiting you may give your child formula again.

Diarrhea:

Diarrhea is loose watery stools. Children can become dehydrated quickly if they lose too much fluid through diarrhea. Sometimes they cannot drink enough fluid to replace lost fluids – especially if they are vomiting or have fever. Once vomiting has stopped you can slowly start a BRAT diet (Bananas, Rice, Applesauce, and Toast.) This should be continued until your child has regular bowel movements again.

Call our office or seek immediate medical care if:

- Your child has severe belly pain.
- Your child has signs of dehydration. These signs include sunken eyes with few tears, a dry mouth with little or no spit, and little or no urine for 8 or more hours.
- Your child has a new or higher fever.
- Your child's stools are black and tarlike or have streaks of blood.
- Your child has new symptoms, such as a rash, an earache, or a sore throat.
- Your child has symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, and belly pain that are worsening.
- Your child cannot keep down medicine or liquids
- Your child is not feeling better within 2 days.