

VOMITING AND DIARRHEA

Gastroenteritis, or the stomach flu, is a common illness to affect children. Most commonly, these illnesses are caused by viruses and are short-lived. The most important part of treating a child with gastroenteritis is to keep them well-hydrated, or full of fluids.

Vomiting, a common symptom of the stomach flu, makes it a challenge to keep someone hydrated. The most important treatment is to continue to give clear fluids, but in small amounts. The best liquids to use for this are the electrolyte solutions that are available in grocery stores and pharmacies (such as Pedialyte, Infalyte, Liquilyte, or Ceralyte.) These solutions provide a small amount of sugar but, importantly, replace the salts that are lost during vomiting. Less ideal alternatives include watered-down white grape juice or Gatorade. Broths, ice-pops and Jell-O are considered fluids too.

It is not only important to provide small amounts of fluid at any time, but to do so frequently. A child who drinks a larger amount is more likely to get an upset stomach and vomit. After a vomiting episode, do not give anything by mouth for 30-60 minutes to allow the stomach to rest. Then, begin giving small amounts of fluid. One trick for smaller children is to use a measuring spoon or medicine spoon to give only one teaspoon or tablespoon at a time, but to do so every 10-15 minutes. Since you will only be giving small amounts, giving it often results in the larger volume needed to replace any fluids lost in vomiting.

Once the vomiting has seemed to stop (about 6-8 hours since the last episode), you may offer bland foods, such as bananas, toast, applesauce or rice. Offer these foods, but do not push them. Trust your child's appetite; if he or she does not have an appetite, it may indicate that their stomach has not yet settled. Once your child has tolerated these bland foods for a meal or two, you may offer their usual diet, once again trusting their appetite.

Diarrhea often comes with or follows the vomiting. Diarrhea is a less scary symptom, since it is easier to drink and stay hydrated. If your child has stopped vomiting, still provide extra fluids to your child in order to replace what is lost in the diarrhea. You may also continue to offer their usual foods (including milk). Once again, trust their appetite and do not force foods on them.

Please call our office if there are any indications of dehydration. These include lack of tears, dry mouth, sunken eyes or lack of urine. Children under 1 year should urinate at least 3 times every 24 hours (i.e. every 8 hours.) Children 1 and older should urinate at least twice every 24 hours (i.e. once every 12 hours.) Another test is to pull up on the skin on the back of the hand or abdomen. The skin should snap back down immediately after you let go of it. If, instead, it "tents" up like

pinched dough, or only very slowly melts back down, this may be a sign of dehydration.

Signs that something more severe is occurring include severe abdominal pain, especially a pain that settles on the right side, vomiting green material (bile), a firm abdomen (as if bracing for a punch), high fevers, or difficulty walking (each step jars the abdomen). Also worrisome is bloody diarrhea. Please call if any of the above appear.