

Helping your child recover from vomiting or diarrhea

What causes vomiting and diarrhea?

Your child may have an illness called gastroenteritis. It causes irritation and swelling of the stomach and bowels.

The most common symptoms are:

- Diarrhea – more bowel movements (poops) than usual, and the poop is less formed and more watery than usual
- Vomiting – throwing up
- Stomach cramps or pain
- Fever – a temperature higher than 38° C (100.4° F) taken under the arm

Gastroenteritis is usually caused by a virus. It can last 1 to 10 days and gets better without medication. Antibiotics are not helpful against viruses and if the illness is caused by bacteria, antibiotics can make it worse.

Can vomiting and diarrhea be dangerous?

The fluid that is lost with vomiting and diarrhea contains water and important sugars, salt and minerals (called electrolytes). Replacing fluid, by drinking small amounts and slowly returning to a regular diet, helps most children recover.

If diarrhea or vomiting is not treated properly, your child can lose too much fluid. If these fluids are not replaced, your child can become dehydrated and may need care in the hospital.

Read more to learn how to:

- ✓ Recognize the signs and symptoms of dehydration.
- ✓ Prevent dehydration by replacing the fluids your child has lost with vomiting and diarrhea.



What should I do if my child is vomiting?

If your child starts to vomit, don't be alarmed. Your child may vomit often, until his or her stomach is empty.

For the first few hours:

Give your child 1 to 2 teaspoons (5 to 10 ml) of an oral rehydration solution (at room temperature) every 5 to 10 minutes.

Oral rehydration solutions

There are many types of oral rehydration solutions. Some have brand names such as Pedialyte[®], others are generic or store brands. Your pharmacist can help you choose one that is right for your child.



If your child doesn't like the taste:

- Try serving it cold.
- Change to another flavour.
- Try frozen oral rehydration solution available as freezies and popsicles.

If this doesn't help, add a small amount of sugar-free flavoring (Crystal Light, Sugar Free Kool Aide) to the solution to make it taste better.

If your child is still refusing, try the following:

- Mix juice with the oral rehydration solution. Use 1 part juice and 2 parts oral rehydration solution.
- If your child is 2 years or older you may give your child an electrolyte sports drink. Some have brand names such as Gatorade[®] or Powerade[®], others are generic or store brands. These drinks are not the same as oral rehydration solutions, but they have more electrolytes than plain juice or soda pop.

What should I do if my child has diarrhea?

Diarrhea is a common problem for babies and children. It is usually mild and lasts less than a week.

Your child may have other symptoms along with diarrhea:

- Fever – a temperature higher than 38° C (100.4° F) taken under the arm
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea – feeling sick
- Vomiting – throwing up
- Stomach cramps or pain
- Blood or mucous in the bowel movement

DO NOT give your child an anti-diarrhea medication from the pharmacy, even though it seems like a good idea.

Most of these medications have side effects and are not good for children under 12 years of age.

How can I prevent dehydration?

1. Replace fluids

If your child has vomiting or diarrhea, prevent dehydration by giving your child small amounts of fluid often. If you give too much fluid too quickly, it will make your child vomit. This takes time, but it is the best way to prevent vomiting and help your child's body absorb necessary water, salts and sugars.

If you are breastfeeding

- Continue breastfeeding. You may need to feed more often because your baby will likely feed for shorter periods. Keep breastfeeding even if your baby continues to vomit.
- If your breasts still feel full after a feeding, this is a sign that your baby may not be feeding well.
- If you prefer, express your milk (by hand or with a pump) and offer it to your child in a medicine dropper. This lets you see how much milk your child is getting.

If you are formula feeding

- Give your baby smaller amounts of formula more often. Prepare the formula as usual, do not add extra water to thin (dilute) the formula.
- If your child continues to vomit, give your child 1 to 2 teaspoons (5 to 10 ml) of an oral rehydration solution (at room temperature) every 5 to 10 minutes.

2. Return your child to a normal diet as soon as possible

It may take a few days for the vomiting or diarrhea to stop. During this time:

- You may continue breastfeeding.
- You do not need to stop milk or formula products.
- Return your child to his or her usual diet as soon as possible. As well as fluids, your child needs the nutrition from foods.

When vomiting has stopped for several hours and your child can keep down larger amounts of fluid, start giving small amounts of food.

Children older than 1 year CAN HAVE:	Children of all ages SHOULD NOT HAVE:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Breastmilk or baby formula.✓ Oral rehydration solutions.✓ Rice, crackers, bread, pasta, potatoes, cereal, boiled eggs, lean meats, soups, fruit, cooked vegetables, bananas, applesauce, yogurt and milk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">× Fatty foods like french fries, chips, ice cream, cheese, or fried meats.× Sugary drinks like juices, soda pop, or carbonated drinks.× Sweetened tea, broth or rice water. These can make diarrhea worse.

What about medications?

Reducing a fever

- Lowering your child's temperature can help your child feel more comfortable and able to drink and eat the foods needed to recover.
- To reduce fever, give acetaminophen (Tylenol[®], Tempra[®] or other brands) or ibuprofen (Advil[®], Motrin[®] or other brands).
- If your child continues to vomit, ask your pharmacist to recommend a suppository. A suppository puts the fever medication into your child's bottom (bum).

Prescription medications

- Continued vomiting and diarrhea may prevent your child from taking (or absorbing) prescribed medications. Talk with your family doctor or pediatrician if this happens.

Can I prevent this illness from spreading?

The virus that causes this illness can be passed from person to person on hands, on objects such as toys, and by sharing food or eating utensils.

Lessen the chance of spreading the illness by:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water, especially after changing diapers or helping your child in the bathroom, and before preparing or eating food.
- Wash your child's hands often with soap and water.
- Keep toys and food preparation areas clean.
- Try to prevent contact between your child and others.

Read the next page to learn:

- ✓ What fluids to give your child.
- ✓ What warning signs to watch for.
- ✓ When to take your child to the doctor.
- ✓ When to get emergency help.



What to do at home to help your child recover from vomiting or diarrhea

Give your child these fluids:

Oral rehydration solution:

How much (volume):

How often (frequency):

How long (duration):

Other instructions:

Watch for these signs and symptoms of dehydration:

- Your child may be less active and may sleep more.
- Your child cries, but has no tears.
- Your child passes urine (pees) less often or has fewer wet diapers.
- Cool, clammy skin.
- Dry lips or mouth.
- Sunken eyes.
- Sunken soft spot on baby's head.

Take your child to the family doctor or pediatrician when:

- Your baby has diarrhea and is less than 6 months old.
- Your child is still vomiting after 4 to 6 hours.
- Your child has diarrhea and a fever higher than 38.5° C (101.3° F).
- Your child has signs or symptoms of dehydration.
- Your child has stomach pains that are getting worse.

Call 911 or go to the Emergency Department when:

- Your child is very sleepy or is difficult to wake up.
- Vomit is bright green.
- Vomit or diarrhea is bloody.
- Your child has not passed urine (peed) or wet a diaper in 8 hours.
- Your child is breathing very fast, or has very deep or slow breathing.
- Your child looks unwell and you are concerned.