



ACUTE GASTROENTERITIS

What is gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is an infection of the intestines that causes diarrhea and sometimes vomiting. It is common in infants and children. Diarrhea and vomiting can cause dehydration, or loss of important fluids and minerals that the body needs. Young infants and children are particularly vulnerable to dehydration.

What causes gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is most commonly caused by a virus, though it can also be caused by several different kinds of bacteria. Viruses and bacteria get into the intestinal tract by putting dirty hands, toys, or other objects near or into the mouth. Proper hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of disease.

What are the symptoms of gastroenteritis?

- Nausea and/or vomiting, particularly for the first 24-48 hours
- Diarrhea (frequent, loose, watery stools) for up to 1 week
- Stomach pain
- Fever
- Feeling unwell, and not wanting to eat or drink

How can I care for my child with gastroenteritis?

Most children with gastroenteritis can be safely cared for at home. The main treatment is to keep your child from getting dehydrated - make sure they are drinking fluids often. Children may need twice as much fluid as usual when they are vomiting or having diarrhea.

If you are breastfeeding, continue to do so. You can also give oral rehydration solutions such as Pedialyte. If you are formula feeding, give oral rehydration fluids initially, then switch to smaller, more frequent formula feeds once the vomiting has decreased or stopped.

For older children, give small amounts of clear fluids (such as Pedialyte or Gatorade) frequently. For children who are hesitant to drink, encourage a few mouthfuls every 15 minutes or so. Stay away from fruit juices if your child has diarrhea, as it will likely worsen the diarrhea. Plain water doesn't have the necessary minerals that your child's body is losing from the vomiting and diarrhea, and should not be used by itself.

Your child may refuse food while they are ill. This is not a problem as long as they are drinking fluids. Generally, if your child is hungry, allow them to eat the food they feel like eating. Foods that are good to offer your child include, cereals, breads, potatoes, plain yogurts, and bananas. Foods may be best tolerated in smaller, more frequent feedings.

How can I treat diaper rash cause by diarrhea?

Clean the diaper area thoroughly with warm water, and mild soap if needed, and gently pat dry. Apply a thick coat of zinc-based cream or ointment to keep the diarrhea from coming into contact with your child's skin.

Wash your hands well (with soap & water) after each diaper change.

Call your doctor if:

- Your child is vomiting frequently and seems unable to keep any fluids down
- Your child is having frequent diarrhea (8-10 per day or more)
- Your child's diarrhea lasts longer than 7 days
- Your child seems dehydrated
 - No urine >6-8 hours
 - Inside of mouth is dry
 - No tears when crying
 - Eyes appear sunken
 - Unusually drowsy or fussy
- Your child is having severe stomach pain
- There is any blood in your child's stool
- Your child's vomit is green