



Diarrhoea and Vomiting (Gastroenteritis)

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you suffer from Diarrhoea and Vomiting. It also tells you when you should become concerned and seek advice from a health professional. Visiting your GP surgery, or a Hospital, or any public areas can put others at risk, so it is best to telephone NHS 111 or the surgery if you feel you need advice.

Useful facts

- **What is Diarrhoea?** Diarrhoea occurs when fluid can't be absorbed from the contents of your bowel, or when extra fluid is secreted into your bowel, causing watery poo.
- **What is vomiting?** Vomiting (being sick) happens when the body wants to expel the contents of the stomach fast.
- **What's causing it?** Diarrhoea and vomiting can be caused by a number of different organisms, including viruses, bacteria and parasites. These are usually contracted by eating contaminated food or drinking contaminated water, but some can be passed directly from person to person. Most cases in children are caused by a virus called rotavirus. Cases in adults are usually caused by norovirus (the "winter vomiting bug") or bacterial food poisoning.

What can I expect to happen?

- ✓ **Duration** Gastroenteritis can be very unpleasant but usually clears up by itself within a week.
- ✓ **Symptoms** Sudden watery diarrhoea, 3 or more times a day, feeling sick, vomiting which can be projectile, mild fever, crampy abdominal pains which typically ease for a while after passing some diarrhoea.

What can I do myself to get better – now and in the future?

- ✓ **Drinking Water** Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. Drink small sips of things like water mixed with juice and soup broth to make sure you get enough salt and sugar. Increase the frequency of breast or bottle feeds in babies.
- ✓ **Medication** Adults can take medicines to help reduce the diarrhoea and shorten how long it lasts. However, you don't have to take these and they won't cure your diarrhoea. Frail or elderly people can dehydrate more easily. You can get sachets with salt, sugar and minerals at the pharmacy that help you stay hydrated. They are called oral rehydration solutions. Take paracetamol for any fever or aches and pains.
- ✓ **Ginger** You may find that ginger helps to relieve your nausea and vomiting. Try stewing fresh ginger in a mug of hot water.

Continued overleaf

- ✓ **Hand washing** Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly on entering and leaving the home, using the toilet and before preparing and eating food.
- ✓ **Surface** Disinfect any surfaces or objects that could be contaminated with a diarrhoea causing virus with a good quality detergent (washing up liquid).
- ✓ **Eating** It used to be advised not to eat for a while, if you had gastroenteritis. However, now it is advised to eat small light meals, if you can. Avoid fatty, spicy and heavy foods at first. Plain food, like wholemeal bread and rice are usually good to start with. Be guided by your appetite.

When should I seek medical help?

Seek advice from your GP if any of the following warning symptoms are present:

- **Severity** You feel very sick and keep vomiting, or the pain is severe (sudden very severe stomach pain may be a sign of appendicitis so go to A+E or call 999).
- **Colour of stool** Your poo is very dark and smelly (this may indicate blood in your poo).
- **Colour of vomit** If vomit is green (bile) or red (blood) or looks like coffee grouts (partly digested blood).
- **Lasting** The diarrhoea doesn't go away after a week or vomiting is not settling after 2 days.
- **Quantity** Persistent vomiting, large quantities of watery diarrhoea, children with 6 or more episodes of diarrhoea in 24 hours.
- **Signs of dehydration** Irritable, drowsy, infrequent urination, pale or mottled skin, dry mouth, cold hands and feet, rapid heartbeat, dizziness especially standing up.
- **Travel** In the last few weeks you have returned from a part of the world with poor sanitation.
- **Poison** You think you have swallowed something poisonous
- **Diabetes** If you have diabetes and have been persistently vomiting, particularly if you need to take insulin.
- **Other symptoms** Vomiting with a stiff neck, high fever and severe headache can be meningitis so call 999 or go to A+E. Seek help if a child just doesn't seem right to you.

Where can I find out more?

Remember that your pharmacist can also help you with assessing your symptoms and advise on suitable treatments. See also www.nhs.uk/conditions/gastroenteritis/pages/introduction.aspx



111 is the NHS non-emergency number. It's fast, easy and free. Call 111 and speak to a highly trained adviser, supported by healthcare professionals. They will ask you a series of questions to assess your symptoms and immediately direct you to the best medical care for you.

NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.