

Diarrhea & Vomiting

What is Diarrhea?

When children suddenly get loose, watery and more frequent bowel movements, they have diarrhea.

What causes vomiting?

Vomiting is a common symptom with many childhood illnesses. It happens when the abdominal muscles and diaphragm contract, while the stomach relaxes. This reflex happens when the body's "vomiting center" is triggered. This reflex is the body's way of protecting itself against toxins, being harmfully full and other gastrointestinal, neurologic, hormonal and psychiatric triggers.

How common is Diarrhea in children?

In the United States, children younger than 4 years may have diarrhea 1 or 2 times each year.

What is the most important thing I should know about vomiting & diarrhea?

The most important part of treating vomiting & diarrhea is to prevent dehydration. Also, remember that 99% of vomiting and diarrhea illnesses are viral in origin! It is rare to have a bacterial gastroenteritis.

What is the best way to prevent Dehydration?

For the first 24 hours or so, consider limiting solid foods and encourage them to suck or drink small amounts of fluids every few minutes over a few hours. Slow frequent fluid challenges! The goal should be having them take in at least 1 ounce (30ml) per hour. Liquids help to prevent dehydration and are less likely than solid foods to trigger further vomiting.

When should I be concerned?

Call your pediatrician if your child shows the following warning signs of Dehydration:

- urinating less frequently (for infants, fewer than 6 wet diapers daily), children-one wet diaper every 12 hours is the minimum
- dry tongue and inside of mouth
- dry eyes and fewer tears when crying
- excessive sleepiness or fussiness
- wrinkled skin in babies
- in older children, weakness dizziness when trying to stand

Note: Stools will be loose if dehydration is caused by diarrhea; if dehydration is due to other fluid loss (vomiting, lack of fluid intake), there will be decreased bowel movements.

Call your pediatrician if your child has Diarrhea and:

- Fever persisting for greater than 24-48 hours
- Bloody Stools
- Diarrhea over 2 weeks (yes, up to 2 weeks can be normal!)
- Vomiting persisting more than 12-24 hours
- Green, blood-tinged, or coffee-ground vomit
- Refusing to drink
- Severe belly pain

How can I manage Diarrhea at home?

Mild Diarrhea without Vomiting:

Diarrhea often goes away a couple of days on its own. For mild diarrhea, electrolyte solutions and change in diet are not needed. However, if your child is bloated or gassy, after drinking formula or cow's milk, ask your pediatrician if these should be avoided.

Mild Diarrhea with Vomiting:

Children who are vomiting with small amount of diarrhea need to stop their usual diets. Electrolyte solutions should be given in small amounts, often until the vomiting stops.

Once the vomiting has lessened, slowly return to your child's usual diet. Some children are not able to tolerate cow's milk when they have diarrhea and it may be briefly removed from the diet. Breastfeeding should continue.

Severe Diarrhea:

Call your pediatrician for your child's severe diarrhea. Children who have watery bowel movement every 1-2 hours and signs of dehydration may need to stop eating for a short period of time (usually 1 day or less). They should focus on drinking to replenish fluids lost from stool. They need to avoid fluids that are high in sugar & salt, and excessively low in sodium.

Which fluids would be recommended?

6 months-1 year of age:

Undiluted breast milk or formula

If not tolerated, consider a commercial rehydration solution that contains sugar & salts (pedialyte).

Over 1 year of age:

Oral Rehydration Solution (pedialyte in form of liquid or popsicles)

Diluted Apple juice (half apple juice and half water)

What about antidiarrheal medicines?

Over-the-counter antidiarrheal medicines are not recommended for children. Diarrhea is the body's way of removing the virus or, rarely, bacteria from the gut. We do not want to stop this process, but rather support the child through the illness.

How can I reduce my child's risk of Diarrhea?

Most diarrhea in children is caused by viruses. Diarrhea can also be caused by bacteria, parasites, changes in diet (such as drinking too much fruit juice), problems with the intestines (such as allergy to foods), lactose intolerance in children and the use of some medicines.

Here are some ways to help prevent diarrhea:

- Stop germs from spreading. Wash hands frequently with soap or using hand sanitizer. Try to keep your child away from children who have diarrhea or are vomiting.
- Do not give your child raw (unpasteurized) milk or foods that may be contaminated.
- Avoid medicines, especially antibiotics, if they are not needed.
- Breastfeed your baby. Breast milk has many substances that formulas don't have that help protect your baby from many diseases and infections. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breastfeeding as the sole source of nutrition for your baby for about 6 months. When you add solid foods to your baby's diet, continue breastfeeding until at least 12 months. You can continue to breastfeed after 12 months if you and your baby desire.
- Limit the amount of juice and sweetened drinks.^{[1][2][3][4][5][6][7][8][9][10][11][12][13][14][15][16][17][18][19][20][21][22][23][24][25][26][27][28][29][30][31][32][33][34][35][36][37][38][39][40][41][42][43][44][45][46][47][48][49][50][51][52][53][54][55][56][57][58][59][60][61][62][63][64][65][66][67][68][69][70][71][72][73][74][75][76][77][78][79][80][81][82][83][84][85][86][87][88][89][90][91][92][93][94][95][96][97][98][99][100]}
- Make sure your child has received the Rotavirus vaccine. The Rotavirus vaccine protects against the most common cause of diarrhea and vomiting in infants and young children.

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