



Diarrhea and Vomiting

When children have infections of the stomach or intestines, they often have diarrhea or vomiting – or both. Most of these infections are caused by viruses. People usually get these viruses by touching an infected person or surface with the virus on it. If people with the virus don't wash their hands, they can spread it to food or liquids they touch. Frequent hand washing, for at least 30 seconds with regular soap and water, or using an alcohol rub like Purell, (especially after helping clean up diarrhea or vomit!) is very important to prevent spreading the virus to family and friends. We don't use medicines to slow down diarrhea, since this could allow the virus (or bacteria) to grow more, and worsen the infection. Since most of these infections are viral, we rarely use antibiotics.

The main thing is to keep enough fluid in the body while waiting for the virus to run its course. Dehydration can be serious and sometimes even require hospitalization. But in most cases, these intestinal illnesses are self-limited, and do not lead to dehydration. Vomiting usually goes away after the first few days, although occasionally it can last longer. Diarrhea tends to start after the vomiting. Diarrhea may not get better for 4-7 days, and sometimes mild diarrhea lingers longer, even up to 2 weeks.

What do I give my child to keep him well-hydrated?

The easiest thing for most children (any age) to keep down when they are vomiting is an oral rehydration solution, such as Pedialyte or Pedialyte popsicles. When the vomiting or diarrhea are more severe (5 or more times in 24 hours), then it becomes very important to make sure that the liquid has the right kind of salts (electrolytes) which the child is losing along with water. Oral rehydration solutions have the right balance of electrolytes, glucose (sugar), and water. Plain water only, for a prolonged period, could lead to low sodium or electrolyte imbalance. If a child refuses oral rehydration solutions, we may recommend other types of clear liquids.

What if my child keeps vomiting and can't keep anything down?

If your child has very frequent vomiting, some doctors like to let the stomach rest for ½ hour to 2 hours, and others prefer to try immediate hydration. At any rate, don't wait longer than a couple hours to begin rehydration. Try to give tiny amounts of Pedialyte frequently (for example, ½ tsp every 3 minutes or 1 tsp every 5 minutes). After she tolerates it for an hour or so, start giving her more. More frequent, smaller feedings will be less likely to cause vomiting because they don't press on the stomach walls. If she cannot keep down even these tiny amounts in a few hours, please call us, because she may need urgent medication or rehydration. If your child is younger than 12 months and has severe vomiting, please call us immediately.

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What if it's not so bad?

For the more mild (although still very unpleasant!) vomiting or diarrhea – less than 4 times in 24 hours – kids often don't need Pedialyte, although it's fine to give it to them. For infants, continue breast milk or formula as usual. For older children, small frequent amounts of regular water, very dilute juice, coconut water, rice water, chamomile tea, peppermint tea, or chicken broth are good rehydrating type of liquids.

Once your child stops vomiting, begin with the "BRAT" diet – Bananas, Rice, Applesauce, Toast. Crackers, noodles, chicken and yogurt are often well tolerated also. Some other foods deserve special mention. Chamomile and peppermint are each nice calming herbs for the tummy; soup broth with salt helps the body restore salts it has lost; bananas help restore potassium; and yogurt with active cultures can help the body regain its normal helpful gut flora. If your child has diarrhea, anything with a lot of sugar such as undiluted fruit juices or sodas, or high fat foods, can make the diarrhea worse.

Call us if:

- Your child looks more and more ill, or is very lethargic.
- Vomiting and diarrhea are severe or persistent.
- There is blood in the vomiting or diarrhea.
- Your child has a severe stomach ache.
- Your child looks dehydrated – signs include:
 - decreased tears when crying
 - dry mouth
 - lethargy
 - no urine for more than 8 hours
 - cold hands and feet