

MY CHILD IS VOMITING – What can I do to help?

What causes vomiting?

Vomiting (or “throwing up”) can be caused by many illnesses. The most common cause of vomiting in young children is a viral infection. Usually the viruses that cause vomiting also cause diarrhea (loose, watery bowel movements).

Vomiting can also indicate that the intestinal tract is obstructed. This is rare in young children, but if your child is vomiting green fluid or has severe abdominal pain, please bring your child in for medical evaluation.

What is a viral infection? Can it be treated?

A viral infection is caused by a germ that lives inside cells. It cannot be treated with antibiotics, and currently there are no medicines for the viruses that cause vomiting and diarrhea. The most common viruses that cause vomiting and diarrhea are called rotavirus, norovirus and astrovirus. (There is a vaccine for infants to prevent rotavirus, but the series of three doses must be started before the child is 10 weeks old.)

The best way to care for a child who has vomiting is to prevent dehydration.

What is dehydration?

Dehydration occurs when too much fluid is lost from the body. This can happen when children have vomiting or diarrhea. Young infants can become dehydrated very quickly – but any person can become dehydrated if unable to drink fluids.

What are the signs of dehydration?

Signs of dehydration include:

- Irritability or decreased energy
- Not urinating as frequently as usual or urine that is darker in color
- Dry mouth or cracked lips
- Sunken eyes or sunken soft spot in younger infants
- Fast heartbeat

If you think your child is becoming dehydrated, please call for medical advice, or bring your child in to be seen.

How can I prevent dehydration?

The most important thing you can do is to encourage your child to drink fluids.

- Offer **ONLY CLEAR LIQUIDS** for the first **8 – 12 hours of illness**
 - Infants less than 9 months of age - Pedialyte, oral rehydration solution, Gatorade, water
 - Older infants and children can also receive - diluted juice, popsicles, soup broth, jello
- Offer **SMALL SIPS** frequently
 - Begin with just ¼ to ½ ounce (1 – 3 teaspoons) of fluid at a time and offer it every 10 – 15 minutes
 - After 2 hours of no vomiting, you can gradually increase the amount of fluid to 1 ounce every 30 minutes.

- After 4 hours of no vomiting, you can increase the amount of fluid to 2 ounces every hour
- Your child should take at least _____ ounces of fluid in 24 hours to stay hydrated
- DO NOT OFFER ANY FOOD DURING THIS TIME!
- Breast fed infants may be able to continue nursing.
 - It will be important to nurse for shorter times and nurse more frequently. For example, you may nurse for 5 minutes on one side every 30 minutes.
 - When your child has not thrown up for 6 - 8 hours, you can return to your normal nursing routine
 - If your baby is urinating less frequently than normal, you can offer an electrolyte solution by bottle in between breast feeding.
- IF YOUR CHILD THROWS UP using this plan, allow the stomach to rest for one hour and offer no liquids or foods during this time. Then begin again with small sips of water. IF YOUR CHILD CONTINUES TO VOMIT, YOUR CHILD SHOULD BE SEEN BY A PEDIATRICIAN.

IF YOUR CHILD HAS NOT VOMITED FOR 8 – 12 HOURS, you may begin offering formula or other liquids. If your child is able to tolerate these liquids for at least 4 hours, you may gradually add other foods that your child normally eats. Cereal, crackers, rice, chicken noodle soup are nice options.

What is the usual course of a viral illness that causes vomiting?

The vomiting usually lasts 24 – 48 hours. Most viruses that cause vomiting also cause diarrhea, and the diarrhea usually begins as the vomiting is ending.

- The diarrhea may last 7 – 10 days.
- Once your child is eating his normal diet, there is no need to change the diet because of the diarrhea.
- You may want to avoid the fruits that loosen bowel movements – like peaches, plums, pears, and prunes.
- You may want to encourage foods like yogurt, bananas, and cereals that help firm the stools.
- Do not give your child medicine to stop the diarrhea
- Probiotics may help your child recover more quickly

Call your physician if your child is vomiting or has diarrhea and:

- Has signs of dehydration
- Has been vomiting for more than 8 hours
- Has blood in the vomit or in stools
- Has not urinated in 6 hours
- May have ingested a poison
- Has a stiff neck or is very irritable
- Is unusually sleepy
- Has abdominal pain
- You have any concerns

