

Happy & Healthy Pediatrics

Pediatric, Adolescent, & Breastfeeding Medicine



Gastroenteritis (Stomach Virus)

Expected Duration: In children, most cases of mild, uncomplicated gastroenteritis last about two to three days. However, even after most symptoms go away, your child may continue to have loose stools or intermittent vomiting for up to 2 weeks.

Prevention: It would be ideal never to get these infections in the first place and being up-to-date with your child's vaccines can help reach that goal. For example, young infants should receive the rotavirus vaccine, which has been shown to protect children against 85% to 98% of severe illness from rotavirus. In addition, to help prevent gastroenteritis in all members of your family, you can take the following steps: Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, especially after using the toilet, after changing diapers and after caring for a child with diarrhea. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer should NOT be used alone. Wash your hands with soap and water before and after preparing food, especially after handling raw meat. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer should NOT be used alone.

Treatment:

- To prevent dehydration, encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids in small, frequent amounts. Offer frequent sips of water. Build up to 1 oz an hour, then 2 oz an hour until the child is able to drink normally. Another good method is to blend water and ice together in a blender or food processor making it into a slushie consistency and having the child eat it slowly with a spoon. If the child vomits, give them nothing by mouth for 1 hour of belly rest, not even a sip of water. Then start the process again providing small, frequent sips of fluid. (A sip every 5 -10 minutes).
- Limit the amount of fluids you give to a child at one time-vomiting children are very thirsty-if you give them a full cup of water they are going to quickly drink it right down, but you are probably going to get it right back. Only give them a small amount in the cup at a time or spoon feed if necessary.
- If you are breastfeeding, continue to breastfeed. Your child may do better with shorter, more frequent feeds. In infants less than 6 months who are not breastfed, do small, frequent amounts of formula (similar volumes as to what is stated above). Pedialyte can be used in all age groups, but it is very salty and kids often refuse to drink it. You want to avoid soft drinks, fruit juice or other sweetened beverages, which usually have too many carbohydrates (sugar) and too little sodium (salt) to restore normal fluid balance in children with gastroenteritis. These fluids can even make diarrhea worsen.
- Only introduce foods once the child has convinced you he or she can keep the fluids down. If the child vomits after eating food, then go back to the liquid protocol as stated above. FOOD IS NOT THE PRIORITY HERE-LIQUIDS ARE TO PREVENT DEHYDRATION. Start off with

bland foods like crackers. Avoid fried or heavy foods initially. Kids can go several days without eating during this type of viral illness. Don't worry. Once the virus passes, and they feel better, they will be very hungry and will make up for not eating for a few days.

- Do not give your child anti-diarrhea medicines. These can interfere with the intestine's ability to pass harmful viruses, bacteria, parasites and toxins out of the body through the stool. This can make it harder to know when your child is actually getting sicker and needs more attention. Anti-vomiting medications are also not recommended for children outside of the hospital/urgent care setting.
- Have your child rest in bed until symptoms subside. Children are usually more sleepy when they have this type of stomach virus. Sleep is healing. Let them sleep when they want to, but when they are awake, resume the small, frequent amounts of fluid.
- Do not allow your child to return to school until diarrhea has begun to improve and they have had no vomiting for > 24 hours.
- If your child is showing signs of significant dehydration and cannot drink fluids, you might need to take him or her to the hospital to receive fluids intravenously (through a vein). This usually only happens after several days of symptoms. **THE MOST IMPORTANT MEASURE OF DEHYDRATION AT HOME IS URINE OUTPUT. AS LONG AS THEY ARE URINATING SOMETHING EVERY 6 HOURS, EVEN IF THE VOLUME IS LESS THAN USUAL, THE CHILD IS PROBABLY OK. IF AT ANY TIME YOUR CHILD IS REALLY ACTING SICK AND IS NOT EASILY AROUSABLE, THEN CALL US IMMEDIATELY.**
- If diarrhea persists, you do not need to limit the child to a "BRAT" diet of rice, bread, toast, etc. Just feed them whatever they feel capable of eating. Lessening dairy for a few days and juices and other sugary drinks may be helpful. Otherwise, just feed them through the diarrhea. Research has shown that the BRAT diet does not lessen the duration of the diarrhea or "bind" the child. The virus just has to run its course.
- Start probiotics daily (see our probiotic handout). Probiotics have shown to lessen the duration and severity of a stomach virus.