

Diarrhoea and vomiting

Diarrhoea and vomiting are common in adults, children and babies.

Vomiting and diarrhoea can happen on their own or together. When vomiting and diarrhoea are caused by an infection it is called gastroenteritis.

Gastroenteritis is caused by a stomach bug. It usually comes from contaminated food or close contact with someone who already has symptoms.

Usually, there is no specific cure. You need to let the illness run its course. Drink plenty of liquids to make sure you do not become [dehydrated](#).

Prevent the spread of COVID-19

Diarrhoea and vomiting can be symptoms of COVID-19.

[Get advice about symptoms of COVID-19 and what to do](#)

Treatment for diarrhoea and vomiting

You can usually treat yourself or your child at home. You don't need to take anti-diarrhoea medicine unless you need to shorten the length of time your diarrhoea lasts.

Children should not take anti-diarrhoea medicine. Anti-vomiting medication is sometimes helpful. Ask your pharmacist or GP for advice.

You don't need antibiotics

Most people with diarrhoea do not need antibiotics. They won't relieve your symptoms or speed up your recovery. Diarrhoea is usually caused by a virus. Antibiotics cannot treat viruses. Your body will fight the virus on its own.

Drink fluids

The most important thing is to drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. Oral rehydration solutions available in your pharmacy can be useful to treat diarrhoea.

Older children may not like the taste of oral rehydration solutions. Clear, flat lemonade type drinks can be given to them to help avoid dehydration.

Do

- ✓ stay at home and get plenty of rest
- ✓ drink lots of fluids – take small sips if you feel sick
- ✓ carry on breastfeeding or bottle-feeding your baby – if your child is being sick, try giving small feeds more often than usual
- ✓ give small sips of water between feeds to babies on formula or solid foods
- ✓ eat when you feel able to – you do not need to have or avoid any specific foods
- ✓ take paracetamol if you're in discomfort – check the leaflet before giving them to your child

Don't

- ✗ do not have fruit juice or fizzy drinks – they can make diarrhoea worse
- ✗ do not make baby formula weaker – use it at its usual strength
- ✗ do not give young children medicine to stop diarrhoea
- ✗ do not give aspirin to children under 16

How long diarrhoea and vomiting last

Diarrhoea caused by gastroenteritis usually starts to improve within 3 days but can last up to 7 days. Vomiting usually lasts 1 to 2 days.

This is the same for both adults and children.

Going back to work or school

If you have a stomach bug, you could be infectious to others.

You're most infectious from when the symptoms start until 2 days after they've passed. Stay off work or school until the symptoms have stopped for 2 days.

Avoid spreading an infection

To avoid spreading an infection:

Do

- ✓ wash your hands with soap and water very often
- ✓ wash soiled clothing and bedding separately on a hot wash
- ✓ clean toilet seats, flush handles, taps, surfaces and door handles

Don't

- ✗ do not prepare food for other people, if possible
- ✗ do not share towels, flannels, cutlery or utensils
- ✗ do not use a swimming pool until a few days after the symptoms stop

Read more about [hand hygiene](#)

Contact your GP if you:

- notice blood in the diarrhoea or vomit
- have bad tummy pain with diarrhoea
- have recently returned from travel abroad
- are on regular medication and cannot take it
- are passing much less urine than usual
- feel weak or have severe muscle pains

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