

The Haven Practice

DIARRHOEA AND VOMITING (GASTROENTERITIS)

Most diarrhoea and vomiting is caused by viruses spread from person to person due to lack of hand washing or in the air from droplets. Some infections are caused by bacteria and these usually come from an infected food source.

Sometimes it is caused by a course of antibiotics which kill the normal bacteria in your gut, as well as the infection they are treating. If you have been abroad it may be caused by a parasite

The bacteria and viruses interfere with the normal function of the gut and cause the intestines to produce more fluid, causing watery diarrhoea.

Symptoms:

- Generalised abdominal pain and cramps
- Watery diarrhoea
- Nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal bloating
- Fever (temperature over 38C)

Prevention:

Good hand washing if someone in the family has gastroenteritis will help stop it spreading.

Take probiotics with antibiotics if you know you are prone to tummy upsets

Get the correct vaccinations if you are travelling abroad.

Treatment:

The majority of gastroenteritis will get better over a week as your body develops immunity to the infection and the natural bacteria in your gut grow back. The main treatment is to prevent dehydration.

Babies and children can become dehydrated much quicker than adults. You need to offer drinks little and often to replace the fluid they have lost.

They can continue to eat their normal food or milk feed but avoid fatty or sugary foods and drinks as these can aggravate the diarrhoea. Continue to breast feed babies but offer cooled boiled

water as well.

Avoid eating or drinking for at least 45 minutes after the last vomit. For older children and adults sucking on ice can help to replace fluid if you can't face drinking.

As you recover start to eat with bland, carbohydrate foods, such as rice, white bread, pasta, potatoes.

Medicines:

Rehydration salts e.g. Dioralyte can help to replace sugars and salts. Always offer little and often.

Take regular Paracetamol or Ibuprofen if you have pain and/or fever. Be careful taking Ibuprofen on an empty stomach as it can be irritating.

DO NOT take anti-diarrhoeal such as Imodium, unless the Doctor tells you to. These medicines work by slowing down the movement of the intestines so can prolong the illness.

Complementary Medicine:

There is some evidence to suggest that taking a probiotic supplement or drink will reduce the time you have diarrhoea.

Complications of Gastroenteritis:

If you develop any complications with the diarrhoea and vomiting you must see the doctor urgently.

Dehydration is the main complication.

Babies:

- No wet nappy for 6 hours
- Soft spot (fontanelle) may be dipped
- Dry mouth and tongue
- Sunken eyes
- Drowsy and lethargic
- Cold hands and feet
- Pale and /or mottled skin

Children and adults:

- Not passed urine for 8 hours
- Dry mouth and tongue

- Dizzy/faint on standing
- Dark concentrated urine
- Feel thirsty

Other complications:

See the Doctor if:

- Temperature in baby under 3 months
- Blood or mucus in the diarrhoea
- Abdominal pain not eased by painkillers
- Temperature for more than 3 days in child or adult
- Vomiting persisting for more than 2 days in children/elderly and 3 days in adults
- Diarrhoea persisting for more than a week in children/elderly and 10 days in adults
- If you are diabetic
- If you have been abroad in the last month you should see the doctor