

Diarrhea and Vomiting

Your child has been diagnosed with diarrhea and vomiting. This is most likely caused by gastroenteritis otherwise known as the stomach flu. Gastroenteritis is a very common childhood illness, usually caused by a virus. Bacteria and parasites may also cause gastroenteritis. Most children with gastroenteritis get better without medication in a few days. Occasionally it may last up to two weeks.

Diarrhea and vomiting can be dangerous if not treated properly. They drain water and salts from your child. If these are not replaced quickly, your child can become dehydrated and may need to be hospitalized. Dehydration happens more quickly in infants and very small children. These children have less "extra" fluids in their bodies to lose.

What is an Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS)?

As soon as vomiting and diarrhea start, your child should be given an oral rehydration solution(ORS). An ORS contains the ideal balance of water, salts (electrolytes), and sugar to replace those lost with diarrhea and vomiting. Common brands include Pedialyte™, Pediatric Electrolyte™, or Gastrolyte™. Gastrolyte must be diluted with water. Be sure to mix it according to the instructions. These ORS's are available at your local pharmacy.

Do not give sugary drinks such as fruit juice, soda pop, sports drinks, sweetened tea, and broth or rice water. These can make your child's condition worse. Serious complications can arise from the loss of salts or electrolytes if an improper replacement solution is used.

To prevent dehydration follow the following instructions:

In The First 6 hours (Initial Phase)

If breast-feeding: Continue to breast-feed, on demand. You may also supplement with an ORS in between feeds. If not breast –feeding: Stop all milk food and drink for 6 hours and give ORS as follows:

6 months and under: 30-90 ml (1-3 oz.) every hour
6 – 24 months: 90-125 ml (3-4 oz.) every hour
Over 2 years: 125-250 ml (4-8oz.) every hour

If your infant refuses ORS by the cup or bottle, give this solution using a medicine dropper or small spoon. If your child vomits, continue to give ORS using a spoon. Give 15 ml (1 tbsp.) every 10-15 minutes until vomiting stops, and then give the regular amount as indicated above.

If vomiting does not stop after 4-6 hours, see your MD It is also important to realize that food intake during the early stages of the illness is not of such great importance, thus do not worry if your child does not seem to want to eat as long as proper hydration is maintained.

6-24 hours (Recovery Phase)

Keep giving the ORS until the diarrhea is less frequent. ORS alone should not be given for more than 24hours. When vomiting stops, offer your child's usual formula or milk and food in small frequent feedings. Give foods that are rich in starch (crackers, rice, toast, pasta, and boiled potatoes) After 24-48 hours most children can resume their normal diet.

What are the sign of dehydration?

Dry lips and mouth

Very dry or wrinkled skin

The absence of tears when crying

Lethargy or a decreased level of activity i.e. not paying attention to toys or television Inconsolable, extreme irritability or crying

A dark color or strong smell to the urine

No urine for more than 8 hours (Babies should wet 6-8 diapers/day.

Toddlers should wet 4-5 diapers/day)

Feeling dizzy when sitting or standing up (in older children) Sunken fontanel (soft spot) in babies

Seek medical attention if any of the following are present:

Signs of dehydration (see above)

Fever lasting more than 2 days

Vomiting persist for more than 4-6 hours

Vomiting bile (yellow/green fluid)

Bloody or black, tarry stools Severe abdominal pain

Your child's condition is worsening

The diarrhea persists for more than two weeks

Your child refuses to drink anything

Your child has very recently traveled outside Canada and the United States

Your child is less than 6 months old

Additional Advice

Do NOT give over-the-counter medications to stop diarrhea. These will stop the body from getting rid of infection.

Careful hand washing after toileting or changing diapers will prevent spread of infection to others.

Bowel movements may be a different color and remain less solid for 1-2 weeks after gastroenteritis.

If your child seems well and is active, these changes are not of concern.

(Sources: Montreal Children's Hospital, Children's Care Clinic, Canadian Pediatric Society)

Important

The information contained herein, is intended as a guideline and is for educational purposes only. If at anytime you are concerned about the well-being of your child, you should seek a medical opinion either at our office, or at the emergency room of your nearest hospital or the Montreal Children's Hospital.