



Gastroenteritis - Fact Sheet

What is gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is an infection in the stomach and intestine. It can affect people of all ages.

What causes gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is usually caused by viruses and less commonly by bacteria or parasites. These may come from contaminated food or from other people as a result of not washing their hands after toileting, nappy changing or prior to food handling.

Babies can become ill very quickly with gastroenteritis. Children, in particular babies, may dehydrate rapidly due to loss of fluids through diarrhoea and vomiting.

Fluids

Whilst your child is unwell it is important to give regular drinks to avoid dehydration. This may be water or a rehydration solution. Drinks with a lot of sugar (including fruit juices and lemonade/soft drinks) should not be given as they can make diarrhoea worse.

If your child continues to vomit, give small drinks often (every 10-15 minutes). As the vomiting settles they can have more drink but less often. Your child should be drinking the amount suggested below while they are awake. If they want to drink more they can. If diarrhoea continues, they will need extra fluid for each large diarrhoea they have.

Weight	Fluid per hour while awake	Approx fluid every 10 mins while awake	Extra fluid for each large diarrhoea
8-10kg	40-50mls	10mls	80mls
10-12.5kg	50-60mls	10mls	100mls
12.5-15kg	60-75mls	15mls	120mls
15-17.5mls	75-90mls	15mls	150mls
17.5-20kg	90-100mls	20mls	175mls
20-30kg	100mls	20mls	200mls
30-45kg	125mls	20mls	300mls



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Food

- Do not starve your child
- There is no need for “light diets” or special foods
- Breastfed babies should continue breast feeding
- Milk and formula are safe and should not be diluted. If you feel the milk is worsening the diarrhoea you will need to see a doctor
- Let your child eat what he/she normally eats. This could include rice, potatoes, bread, cereal, lean meats, yoghurt, fruit and vegetables. However, avoid sugary/sweet foods as they can make the diarrhoea worse.

When to see your doctor

- if your child is less than 3 months old as young babies can become ill very quickly
- If your child is continually vomiting and cannot keep fluids down
- If you are concerned about the number of watery bowel motions being passed or if the motions have blood in them
- If your child has symptoms of dehydration:
 1. Drowsiness
 2. Lethargic
 3. Irritable
 4. Dry mouth
 5. Eyes look sunken
 6. Goes for 12 hours without passing urine

What to do

- As long as the child has acute diarrhoea and vomiting keep him/her away from other children as much as possible and home from school or childcare centres
- Wash your hands after toileting or playing with your child
- Teach your child to always wash his/her hands after going to the toilet.

If you are concerned, attend your local GP or closest emergency centre.