

PATIENT INFORMATION: DIARRHOEA & VOMITING (ADULT)

WHAT IS GASTROENTERITIS ?

Gastroenteritis ('Gastro') is a bowel infection that causes diarrhoea (*runny, watery stools*) and it may also cause vomiting, abdominal pain, fever and lethargy (*extreme tiredness*). The diarrhoea may last longer than the vomiting.

Gastro is most commonly caused by a virus so antibiotics will usually not work, and could even be bad for you. In most cases the infection clears over a few days.

HOW IS GASTRO TREATED?

In most cases the infection clears by itself over a few days (*Although it can take up to a week or two*). The main focus is to take in plenty of fluid to treat and prevent dehydration.

Most people do not need to be admitted to the hospital or treated with antibiotics

DEHYDRATION...

The main thing to worry about with gastro is dehydration (*loss of too much fluid from the body*). Older people or those with lots of medical problems can become severely dehydrated and this can happen quite quickly.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF DEHYDRATION?

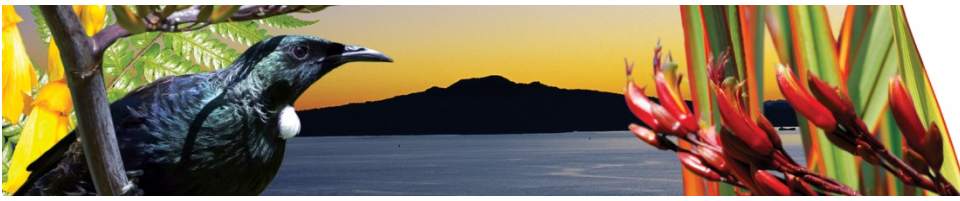
- You may feel thirsty and / or have a dry mouth
- Feel lethargic (sleepy) or irritable
- You may notice you make a lot less urine than usual

ORAL FLUIDS (ORAL REHYDRATION)

- It is important to keep up with taking oral fluids - even if you still feel nauseated. You **will** still absorb some of the fluid. The trick is to take smaller drinks, more often.
- Rehydration drinks such as '**Gastrolyte**' or '**Pedialyte**' provide a good balance of water, salts, and sugar. The small amount of sugar and salt helps the water to be absorbed better from the bowel (intestine) into the body.
- **Oral rehydration fluids do not stop or reduce diarrhoea.**
- Rehydration drinks (e.g. Gastrolyte) are made from sachets that you can buy from pharmacies. (The sachets are also available on prescription.)
- Sports drinks: like 'Powerade' are fine as long as they are diluted 50:50 with water.

Do not use home-made rehydration solutions as they often do not have the right amount of salt or sugar and can be dangerous.

The secret is to take small amounts regularly – e.g. taking a sip or two (10-20 mL) every 5 minutes. That way if you keep on doing it you will be able to keep the fluid down. Drinking a lot at once can often bring on vomiting.



WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO HELP GET BETTER?

MEDICATION:

Do not take medicines at home to reduce the vomiting or diarrhoea, unless they were prescribed by your doctor or nurse specialist. They may be harmful.

Take only prescribed medication by your doctor.

DIET:

It is best to eat small, light meals if you can.

Be guided by your appetite (*how hungry you are feeling*). You may not feel like food and most adults can do without food for a few days.

Eat as soon as you are able - but don't stop drinking regular fluids.

If you do feel like eating, avoid fatty, spicy or heavy food (*like chocolate cake or meat*) at first. Plain foods such as wholemeal bread and rice are good foods to try eating first.

PREVENT THE SPREAD OF GASTRO:

Gastro spreads very easily to others. You can help prevent spreading the disease by:

- Wash and dry hands thoroughly - especially after using the toilet, and before food preparation.
- Clean the toilet and bathroom areas often and carefully.
- Do not share food and drinks.
- Keep away from friends and other children until vomiting and diarrhoea have stopped.
- Avoid going back to work for 48 hrs after passing a normal motion.

WHEN TO COME BACK TO THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

You have been treated in the ED for diarrhoea and vomiting. We suspect that you have Gastroenteritis.

In rare cases diarrhoea and vomiting can also be a sign of something else going on – like early appendicitis.

That is why it is important that you come back to the Emergency Department, or see your family doctor if you become more unwell or develop any of the following:

- Lots of diarrhoea (*8-10 watery motions*)
- Lots of vomiting
- You are unable to keep fluids down
- Blood in the diarrhoea or vomit
- Strong (*severe*) stomach pains
- Signs of **dehydration**
- **If your symptoms are getting worse**
- If you are concerned for any other reason

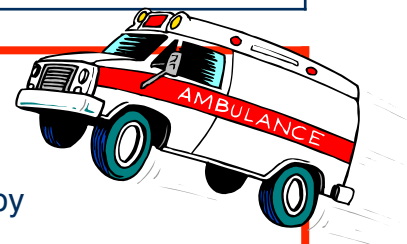
DANGER SIGNS - When to call an ambulance

If you notice:

- Very cold hands and feet
- Racing heart or palpitations
- Confusion or lose consciousness

Or if you become:

- Very lethargic or sleepy
- Floppy or limp
- Pale and sweaty



DIAL 111 for an AMBULANCE

WHERE TO GET MORE ADVICE OR INFORMATION

- Your family doctor
- After hours medical service
- Healthline 0800 611 116