

Vomiting and Diarrhoea

What is vomiting and Diarrhoea?

Vomiting and diarrhoea are common symptoms that affect people of all ages, from babies to adults. Vomiting occurs when nerves in the body or brain sense a trigger, such as an infection or food. Whereas diarrhoea (loose or watery stools, at least three times in 24 hours) occurs from increasing amounts of water coming into the gut from around the body, or when you are not able to absorb water from your food and drink.

People can develop diarrhoea and/ or vomiting for a variety of reasons. Most of the time it is due to gastroenteritis, an infection in the gut. Common causes are outlined on the right.

Signs and symptoms

Signs and symptoms that are associated with a common bout of diarrhoea and or vomiting can include:

- Abdominal cramping
- Abdominal pain
- Bloating
- Fever and/or chills
- Nausea
- Urgent need to have a bowel movement

If you experience blood or mucus in your stools, stools that look black or like tar or severe abdominal pain then you need to see a health professional as this could be a sign of several different more serious digestive conditions.

Vomiting and diarrhoea are usually self-limiting conditions where people start to feel better in 1-2 days and can manage at home. However, if the vomiting and/or diarrhoea is severe or persistent, dehydration can occur.

Dehydration

Dehydration occurs when you lose too much fluid. Babies/young children, pregnant women and the elderly are most at risk and can become dehydrated quickly, but dehydration can occur at any age.

You should check in with your health professional if you have diarrhoea that lasts longer than three days or uncontrollable vomiting or retching, which makes it

Vomiting	Diarrhoea
Gastroenteritis	Gastroenteritis
Food poisoning	Food poisoning
Certain medicines e.g. chemotherapy	Certain medicines e.g. chemotherapy
Certain foods or drinks e.g. alcohol or dairy in those who are lactose intolerant	Certain foods or drinks e.g. alcohol or dairy in those who are lactose intolerant
Motion Sickness or vertigo	Traveller's diarrhoea (usually in developing countries or close quarter living e.g. cruise ship)
Pregnancy	Consuming or using contaminated water
Conditions such as Coeliac's disease or appendicitis	Conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease or irritable bowel syndrome

impossible to keep down fluids for more than one day. These situations put you at high risk of dehydration.

Signs of dehydration include:

- **Little or lack of urine**, or urine that is darker than usual (fewer than 6 wet nappies a day for infants and 8 hours or more without urinating for children).
- **Thirst** - babies may show thirst by crying, being irritable and eager to drink when something is offered.
- **No sweat or no tears** when crying
- **Dry mouth**
- **Sunken eyes** - In babies who are younger than 18 months old, sunken soft spots on the top of their heads.
- **Skin** that is **not as springy** or elastic as usual.
- **Dizziness**/light-headedness, confusion, or sleepiness
- **Muscle cramps**

Self-care for vomiting and diarrhoea

A few home remedies can also help reduce diarrhoea and vomiting symptoms and avoid dehydration:


- **Rest.** Your body needs a chance to fight off the cause of

PROVIDES UP TO

30% FASTER

recovery from vomiting and diarrhoea than water alone*

SO, YOU
CAN GET BACK
ON YOUR FEET
QUICKLY



*World Health Organisation. Implementing the new recommendations on the clinical management of diarrhoea: guidelines for policy makers and programme managers (2006).

your symptoms such as an infection. Letting yourself rest can also help alleviate dizziness if your vomiting is from motion sickness.

- **Hydration.** Dehydration can be dangerous, especially for infants, children, pregnant women and older adults. Slowly sipping water, broth, or oral rehydration solutions that replace electrolytes can all help you to avoid dehydration. If you can't keep liquids down, try sucking on ice chips or an ice block.

- **Eat lightly.** Once your appetite returns, eat little amounts, and avoid spicy or fatty foods, high dairy foods and caffeine. Bland foods you may want to try are soft-boiled eggs, toast, bananas, crackers and rice

- **Avoid pain medicines,** such as ibuprofen, that may irritate the stomach when you have vomiting or diarrhoea.

If you have babies or toddlers:

- Give your baby smaller feedings more often if needed.
- Give sips of water or oral rehydration solution (see below) between breast feeding, formula, or solid food.

You should seek medical advice if vomiting or diarrhoea persists for more than 6 hours in infants under 6 months or **12 hours** in children under 3 years.

Medicines and supplements

There are pharmacy and prescription medications available for vomiting and diarrhoea. While generally safe you should not take medicines without first consulting a health professional.

- **Anti-diarrhoea medicines** e.g. loperamide.
These types of medicines are used to treat diarrhoea. They work by slowing the movement of the gut, and in this way reduces the number of bowel motions and firms up the stool. Loperamide helps to ease diarrhoea but does not treat the cause of diarrhoea, such as infection. You can buy these medicines at the pharmacy or supermarket. These medicines are not usually recommended for children under 12 years of age.
- **Anti-emetics** e.g. metoclopramide or promethazine
These types of medicines are used to reduce vomiting and may be recommended in certain situations (for example, to reduce the risk of dehydration in those who vomit repeatedly). Most of these medicines require a prescription. Anti-emetics used for motion sickness can be brought at a pharmacy but should not be used in those under 2 years of age.
- **Oral rehydration solutions** e.g. Hydralyte
When you become dehydrated from vomiting and diarrhoea, not only do you lose water from your body but also sugar, salts and minerals. Certain types of salts and

sugars (sodium, glucose) are needed by your body for many processes, such as brain function, to aid digestion and to regulate blood pressure. So it is important to replace them if you have become dehydrated. Oral rehydration solutions replace the water and electrolytes (salts and minerals) your body needs to recover, unlike sports or energy drinks.

Oral rehydration solutions are suitable for any age (including infants) and come in different flavours and can be brought from the supermarket or pharmacy as drinks, ice blocks, sachets or effervescent tablets for making solutions.

Drinks such as fizzy/soda, tea, coffee and rice water are not recommended in vomiting and diarrhoea as they may make it worse. Do not try to prepare oral rehydration solution recipes at home, because the formulas must be exact.

Take home message

Most of the time, vomiting and diarrhoea are due to a stomach infection or food poisoning and clear up on their own within a few days. Getting plenty of fluids, resting and eating a bland diet can help.

Keep an eye out for signs of dehydration, especially in infants/toddlers who are not able to communicate what they are feeling or older people. Some medicines or oral rehydration solutions may help to avoid dehydration and aid recovery. Talk with a health professional if you have severe symptoms or symptoms that last more than a few days.

Need advice or more information?

If you need further information or general health advice call Healthline free call 0800 611 116 anytime or if you want to find health services near you - you can check out health point at www.healthpoint.co.nz

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For more information on rehydration visit www.hydralyte.co.nz

Always read the label. Use only as directed. If symptoms persist, consult your health care professional. If you have kidney disease or are taking heart or blood pressure medicines, consult your doctor or pharmacist before use. Distributed by Healthcare Logistics, Auckland.



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