

Treating Vomiting

Definition

- Vomiting is the forceful emptying (throwing up) of a large portion of the stomach's contents through the mouth
- Nausea and abdominal discomfort usually precede each bout of vomiting

Causes

- Main cause: stomach infection (gastritis) from a stomach virus (e.g., Rotavirus). The illness starts with vomiting but diarrhea usually follows within 12-24 hours.
- Food poisoning from toxins produced by bacteria growing in poorly refrigerated foods (e.g. [Staphylococcus](#) toxin in egg salad or [Bacillus cereus](#) toxin in rice dishes).
- Serious causes: If vomiting persists as an isolated symptom (without diarrhea) for more than 24 hours, more serious causes must be considered. Examples are [appendicitis](#), kidney infection, [meningitis](#), [head injury](#), etc.
- Vomiting can also be triggered by hard coughing. This is common especially in children with reflux.

Severity of Vomiting

The following is an arbitrary attempt to classify vomiting by risk for dehydration:

- MILD: 1 - 2 times/day
- MODERATE: 3 - 7 times/day
- SEVERE: Vomits everything or nearly everything or 8 or more times/day
- Severity relates even more to the length of time that the particular severity level has persisted. At the beginning of a vomiting illness (especially following food poisoning), it's common for a child to vomit everything for 3 or 4 hours and then become stable with mild or moderate vomiting.
- The younger the child, the greater the risk for dehydration.

What's the best way to treat vomiting?

In most cases, vomiting will stop without specific medical treatment. The majority of cases are caused by a virus and will get better on their own. You should never use over-the-counter or prescription remedies unless they've been specifically prescribed by your pediatrician for your child and for this particular illness.

When your infant or young child is vomiting, keep her lying on her stomach or side as much as possible. Doing this will minimize the chances of her inhaling vomit into her upper airway and lungs.

Watch for Dehydration

When there is continued vomiting, you need to make certain that dehydration doesn't occur. Dehydration is a term used when the body loses so much water that it can no longer function efficiently. If allowed to reach a severe degree, it can be serious and life-threatening. To prevent this from happening, make sure your child consumes enough extra fluids to restore what has been lost through throwing up. If she vomits these fluids, notify your pediatrician.

Modify Your Child's Diet

For the first twenty-four hours or so of any illness that causes vomiting, keep your child off solid foods, and encourage her to suck or drink small amounts of electrolyte solution (ask your pediatrician which one), clear fluids such as water, sugar water (1/2 teaspoon [2.5 ml] sugar in 4 ounces [120 ml] of water), Popsicles, gelatin water (1 teaspoon [5 ml] of flavored gelatin in 4 ounces of water) instead of eating. Liquids not only help to prevent dehydration, but also are less likely than solid foods to stimulate further vomiting.

Be sure to follow your pediatrician's guidelines for giving your child fluids. Your doctor will adhere to requirements like those described below.

Estimated Oral Fluid and Electrolyte Requirements by Body Weight

Body Weight (in pounds)	Minimum Daily Fluid Requirements (in ounces)*	Electrolyte Solution Requirements for Mild Diarrhea (in ounces for 24 hours)
6-7	10	16
11	15	23
22	25	40
26	28	44
33	32	51
40	38	61

1 pound = 0.45 kilograms 1 ounce = 30 ml

***NOTE:** This is the *smallest* amount of fluid that a normal child requires. Most children drink more than this.

In most cases, your child will just need to stay at home and receive a liquid diet for twelve to twenty-four hours. Your pediatrician usually won't prescribe a drug to treat the vomiting, but some doctors will prescribe anti-nausea medications to children.

If your child also has diarrhea, ask your pediatrician for instructions on giving liquids and restoring solids to her diet.

When to Call the Pediatrician

If she can't retain any clear liquids or if the symptoms become more severe, notify your pediatrician. She will examine your child and may order blood and urine tests or X-rays to make a diagnosis. Occasionally hospital care may be necessary.

Until your child feels better, remember to keep her hydrated, and call your pediatrician right away if she shows signs of dehydration. If your child looks sick, the symptoms aren't improving with time, or your pediatrician suspects a bacterial infection, he may perform a culture of the stool, and treat appropriately.