

Care of Nausea, Vomiting, & Diarrhea

What is gastroenteritis?

Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea are common symptoms of gastroenteritis - the inflammation and irritation of the stomach and the intestines. Severe cases may lead to dehydration, especially in infants and the elderly.

What causes gastroenteritis?

- Viruses
- Bacteria (e.g. Salmonella)
- Intestinal parasites (e.g. giardia). This is more common after international travel.
- Certain medications (e.g. aspirin, ibuprofen, antibiotics, corticosteroids)
- Stress
- Excessive alcohol or tobacco use
- Food allergies

What are the symptoms?

- Abdominal cramps
- Nausea/vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Loss of appetite
- Weakness
- Fever or chills
- Dehydration

What should I do to manage my symptoms?

Your primary goal is to prevent dehydration by drinking water. Do not eat or drink anything for 1 to 2 hours after the last episode of vomiting. Then try ice chips or small amounts of water. To help prevent/treat dehydration, drink sips of clear fluids for the first 12 hours, ideally water. Other good options include ginger ale, sports drinks, flat soda or clear broth. Increase fluids as tolerated. After 12 hours, try small amounts of bland foods, such as rice, potatoes, crackers, pretzels, dry toast, applesauce, cream-less soups, bananas. After bland food is tolerated, resume a normal diet as tolerated.

The following may be more difficult to digest during the next 24-48 hours:

- Milk and other dairy products
- Alcohol
- Raw fruits and vegetables
- Spicy or fatty foods
- Pizza

If diarrhea is the only symptom, follow a bland diet until improved. Diarrhea may last for 7 days and stools may not return to normal for 2-3 weeks.

How to prevent the spread of viral or bacterial gastroenteritis

Viruses causing nausea and vomiting are spread easily. Pay special attention to hand washing with soap and water, especially after toilet visits and before eating or preparing food. Avoid using towels, tableware, and cups used by infected person. Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness. First spray the area with a disinfectant cleaner, e.g. Lysol or dilute bleach solution (mix at least 1 part bleach to 50 parts water but not more than 1 part bleach to 10 parts water.), then clean with the disinfectant and disposable gloves. Cleanup waste should be placed in a plastic bag, then in the trash. Immediately remove and wash clothing or linens that may be contaminated after an episode of illness (use hot water and soap).

When should I seek medical attention?

- Fever > 100.4°F (38°C)
- Signs of dehydration, such as dizziness when standing up or walking
- Weakness or abdominal pain for > 2 hours
- No improvement or diarrhea worsens after 48 hours of home care measures
- Yellow, frothy, bloody, or green stool occurs more than one time
- Persistent vomiting

- Persons with insulin-dependent diabetes should follow sick day plans. Monitor glucose and ketones. Seek medical attention if unable to drink due to nausea or vomiting or if glucose is persistently over 250.

For medical attention, make an [appointment](#) [1] or call Campus Health to speak to a nurse.

[Where can I find more information?](#)

[Detailed handouts on GI distress](#) [2] are available from the UNC Functional GI Clinic.

 [Gastroenteritis 2020.pdf](#) [3]

Source URL: <https://campushealth.unc.edu/health-topics/medical-conditions/care-nausea-vomiting-diarrhea>

Links

[1] <https://campushealth.unc.edu/about-us/appointments>

[2] <https://www.med.unc.edu/ibs/patient-education/educational-gi-handouts/>

[3]

<https://campushealth.unc.edu/sites/campushealth.unc.edu/files/Gastroenteritis%202020.pdf>