

Treatment for Vomiting and/or Diarrhea in Young Children

Upsets of the digestive system are common with just about any illness. Specific GI upsets are usually caused by viruses and only rarely are they due to bacterial infections. The most important thing is to make sure the child does not develop **dehydration**: dry eyes, dry mouth, dry diapers (or not voiding at least twice a day), and increasingly poor activity levels. These are signs that your child is not able to keep up with the fluid losses and should be seen by a doctor as soon as possible. Modern diapers are sometimes so absorbent that you can't tell whether a child has urinated; therefore, stick a Kleenex down the front to tell whether the child has voided.

There are no good anti-vomiting and anti-diarrhea medicines for infants and young children. Medical studies show that not only are they usually not effective, they can be harmful by allowing some harmful bacteria to overgrow thus prolonging the symptoms

Vomiting: Anything that upsets your child's body can cause vomiting. The secret in treating children with vomiting is to give frequent, small amounts of cold fluids. In infants simply give an oral rehydration solution, such as **Pedialyte**[®], which can be purchased at any supermarket or drug store. Pedialyte type solutions contain water, sugar, and salts in the right balance that your child needs. This also comes in flavors, and in freeze pops that allow your child some choice in the matter. Don't substitute plain water for oral rehydration solutions; drinking nothing but water can be harmful, though children may drink small amounts of water in addition to the solution if they want to.

Start with 1 ounce of Pedialyte or, for older kids, a half Pedialyte freeze pop. Wait 15 minutes and, if it is retained, gradually increase the amount of liquid until the child is tolerating 1-2 ounces every 30 minutes. Later, increase the diet to include bland solids: bananas, rice, applesauce, dry toast, crackers, etc. If repeated vomiting is accompanied by severe abdominal pain, or is especially forceful, or if it lasts more than 12 hours, they probably need a visit to the doctor.

Diarrhea: Diarrhea is typically a sudden increase in the amount and frequency of stools, along with a change in color and consistency-typically liquid and greenish. High fever, presence of blood, pus, or lots of mucus in the stool may be signs of more serious infection.

Diarrhea can usually be controlled by the following diet:

- For infants, give nothing to eat or drink for 2 to 3 hours. Breast-feeding can usually be continued unless the diarrhea and/or vomiting is severe. Give only Pedialyte or breast feeding for the next half-day. Allow them to drink as much of the either as they want.
- For bottle-fed infants, after Pedialyte is tolerated you may start soy formula such as Isomil DF[®] or ProSoBee[®] for a week or so before gradually reintroducing the child's regular formula.
- For older children, a **BRAT** diet (**B**ananas, **R**ice, **A**pplesauce, **T**oast) may be given to firm up stools. Also peas, carrots, and crackers are helpful. Gradually add other bland foods as tolerated. Don't worry if you see bits and pieces of food in your child's stools. Even though some of the food is not getting fully digested, your child is still getting needed calories and nutrients.
- For older children **do not give any juice, milk**, cheese, ice cream, or corn for 5-6 days after diarrhea subsides. Avoid red food dyes as these will cause confusing red-colored stools.
- **Probiotics** are medicines that contain certain bacteria that are **normally present in the healthy GI tract**. We can give these probiotics to restore the normal germs in the gut that may have been replaced by unhealthy germs. Yogurt is the easiest source of probiotics and you can give your child over 6 months old 2 to 6 oz of yogurt twice a day. Even more powerful, are capsules of probiotics that can be bought inexpensively without a prescription at most pharmacies under such names as Culturelle[®], Florastor[®], and Phillips Colon Health[®], or store brands such as *lactobacillus* and *acidophilus* capsules. These can be swallowed or opened up and sprinkled onto your child's food 1-2 times a day.

Every doctor has their own preferences for the control of vomiting and diarrhea; therefore, you might find variations or additions to these recommendations. Again, there are no good anti-vomiting and anti-diarrhea medicines for infants and young children. If diarrhea persists beyond a reasonable number of days or the child seems otherwise ill, make an appointment with us to see your child.