

Diarrhoea and vomiting

There are many causes of diarrhoea and vomiting, the most common being viral. Other symptoms such as headache, fever, generalised aches and pains and tiredness may also be present.

Often this is referred to as [gastroenteritis](#) or [gastro](#).

Symptoms usually begin about one to two days after exposure to the source of the infection. Most cases resolve with rest.

The main concern with gastro is dehydration due to loss of fluid, salts and minerals.

Gastro is also highly infectious. Gastroenteritis causing germs can survive on contaminated surfaces for up to 24 hours or longer. Vomiting usually settles quickly but diarrhoea may last up to seven days.

Home care advice

Do

- > try sucking ice cubes or icy poles if you are having trouble keeping fluids down
- > regularly drink small amounts of water to prevent dehydration once the vomiting has stopped
- > drink oral rehydration drinks such as Gastrolyte® (available from pharmacies)
- > if you feel like eating, eat bland foods such as crackers, rice or dry toast
- > rest while you feel unwell
- > complete any medications prescribed by your doctor
- > wash hands diligently after using the toilet and prior to eating
- > thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces immediately after an episode of illness by using a bleach-based household cleaner
- > immediately remove and wash any clothes or bedding contaminated with vomit or diarrhoea using soap and hot water.

Do not

- > take anti-diarrhoea medications without advice from your clinician, doctor or pharmacist
- > drink alcohol, carbonated drinks or eat spicy foods
- > smoke cigarettes or take recreational drugs
- > go to work or school for at least 24 hours after symptoms have stopped
- > handle or prepare food for others for at least 24 hours after symptoms have stopped.

What to expect

Most people with gastro will feel better in a day or two.

If the cause is viral, antibiotics will not help.

It is safe for most people to be cared for at home. If you have diabetes or heart, kidney or liver problems seek immediate help.

See your family GP or go to an emergency department if any of the following develop

- > severe pain or cramps in the abdomen
- > a high temperature
- > unusual fatigue or feeling faint
- > blood in your vomit
- > blood or mucous in your bowel motions
- > inability to keep fluids down
- > repeated vomiting
- > signs of dehydration – dry mouth, excessive thirst, dizziness, passing little or dark coloured urine
- > abdominal swelling.

Prevention

- > Always wash your hands frequently and thoroughly, especially prior to preparing food and after going to the toilet.
- > Avoid close contact with anyone who is sick with gastro.
- > Avoid preparing food if you have gastro and do not prepare it for anyone else.
- > Wash children's toys in a mild detergent to prevent transmission.
- > When travelling overseas, drink and brush your teeth with bottled water.
- > Try to avoid raw foods and only eat well cooked meats.

Where to get help

- > Find a [GP/doctor](#)
- > Search a [GP urgent care practice \(external site\)](#)
- > Visit [healthdirect \(external site\)](#) or call 1800 022 222

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See also

- > [Bowel health](#)
- > [Constipation](#)