

# MANAGING YOUR GASTROENTERITIS



Viral gastroenteritis, or stomach flu, is an infection caused by a virus that affects the stomach and intestines. It can occur after contact with someone with the infection.



The most common symptoms are vomiting and diarrhea.



Other symptoms include fever and chills, feeling weak and tired, headache, and aching muscles.

Your health care provider will examine you and review your symptoms. Your health care provider may order tests to rule out other conditions.



## What Is Gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is inflammation (redness, irritation) of the stomach and intestines. Viral gastroenteritis, often called stomach flu, is an infection caused by a virus that affects the stomach and small intestine.

## What Causes Gastroenteritis?

Many viruses can cause gastroenteritis. These viruses include rotaviruses and noroviruses. People get the virus by eating or drinking contaminated food or water, or by directly contacting someone infected by the virus, such as by shaking hands, kissing, or sharing a drink, food, or utensils. Often, someone with the virus handles food without washing hands after using the bathroom, so the virus is passed on by eating the food.

## What Are the Symptoms of Gastroenteritis?

The most common symptoms are vomiting and diarrhea. Others include headache, fever, abdominal cramping, loss of appetite, feeling tired and weak, nausea, chills, and aching muscles.

## How Is Gastroenteritis Diagnosed?

The health care provider will do a physical examination and review the symptoms. The health care provider may also order tests to rule out certain conditions, such as appendicitis, dehydration, or a serious infection.



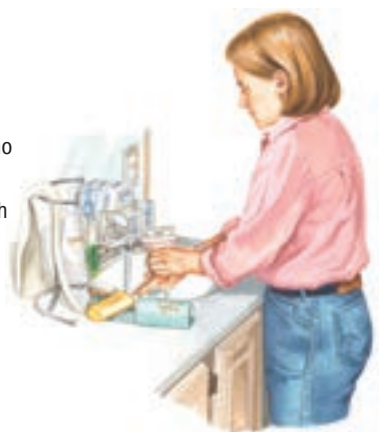
It's most important to avoid dehydration. Drinking clear fluids is best. Medicines such as antibiotics don't work for viral gastroenteritis.



Soft, bland foods can be tried slowly. Such foods include toast, broth, apples, bananas, and rice.



Avoid contact with others who have the infection. To avoid spreading the infection, wash your hands often.



Call your health care provider if you have persistent nausea or vomiting.

## How Is Gastroenteritis Treated?

Medicines such as antibiotics aren't used for viral gastroenteritis. Antibiotics don't work on viruses, and overusing them can result in growth of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

The most important thing to do is avoid dehydration (loss of too much body fluid).

Drinking clear fluids allows the stomach and intestines to rest and get better. Fluids should be drunk slowly. Fluid loss from diarrhea and vomiting can affect babies and children more than adults, so they may need oral rehydration solutions (such as Pedialyte®). Drinking fluids should start slowly.

If the stomach can keep fluids down, soft, bland foods can be tried slowly. Such foods include toast, broth, apples, bananas, and rice. Avoid dairy products, caffeine, and alcohol.

Medicine may be used to treat symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, fever, and body aches.

People usually get better in a few days, but if not, another visit to the health care provider may be needed.

## DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Gastroenteritis:

- ✓ **DO** clean surfaces that have been touched by infected people.
- ✓ **DO** drink clear fluids, then add food gradually.
- ✓ **DO** wash your hands often, especially after using the bathroom.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have persistent vomiting or diarrhea.
- ⊗ **DON'T** have close contact (for example, by shaking hands) with others until symptoms have resolved.
- ⊗ **DON'T** give your child medicine without asking your health care provider.

### FROM THE DESK OF

#### NOTES

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Contact the following sources:

- American Gastroenterological Association  
Tel: (301) 654-2055  
**Website: <http://www.gastro.org>**
- American College of Gastroenterology  
Tel: (301) 263-9000  
**Website: <http://www.acg.gi.org>**