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Diarrhoea and vomiting in children (page 1 of 3)

This information is for parents or carers of children under 5 with diarrhoea and vomiting. It gives advice on how to look after your child, the symptoms to look out for and what to do if your child's symptoms get worse. It is not meant to be a substitute for advice from a doctor or nurse, or NHS Direct.

When young children suddenly begin to have diarrhoea this is usually caused by an infection in the gut. This illness is known as gastroenteritis.

Does my child need to see a doctor?

Most children with gastroenteritis get better quickly without treatment. You will normally be able to look after your child safely at home.

About dehydration

Severe diarrhoea and vomiting can lead to dehydration, which is when the body doesn't have enough water or the right balance of salts to carry out its normal functions. If the dehydration becomes severe it can be dangerous.

Children at risk of dehydration include; young babies, children who haven't been able to drink enough during their illness and children whose diarrhoea and vomiting has been severe.

Contact your doctor, if your child develops any of the symptoms of dehydration listed below. Some of the symptoms of dehydration are:

- * seeming unwell
- * pale or mottled skin
- * passing less urine than normal
- * cold hands and feet.
- * being unusually irritable or lethargic

How to prevent dehydration

If your child has gastroenteritis but is not dehydrated:

- keep feeding them as normal (for example, breast milk) and offer plenty of drinks
- fruit juice and fizzy drinks should be discouraged, because these can make diarrhoea worse
- your doctor, may recommend that you give your child a special fluid know as ORS (Oral Rehydration Salt Solution). ORS can help

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prevent dehydration from occurring. It is also used to treat children who have become dehydrated.

Treating dehydration

How to treat dehydration at home.

- most children who are dehydrated can be rehydrated by giving them ORS to drink
- make up the ORS according to the instructions on the packet. Your doctor can tell you how much your child should drink
- give your child frequent, small drinks of ORS
- your child may vomit a little when they start to drink the ORS
- contact a doctor if your child keeps vomiting or will not drink the solution
- if you are breastfeeding your child, continue to breastfeed in addition to giving the ORS
- if you are not breastfeeding your children, don't give your child any other drinks unless your doctor tells you it's OK to do so
- your child should not eat solid food until they are rehydrated
- it usually takes about four hours to complete rehydration.

Going to hospital

Your child may need to go to hospital if they won't drink the ORS, or keep being sick, or if the dehydration is severe, or if your doctor is concerned.

Caring for your child after rehydration

- it's important your child eats well after they are rehydrated, to help with recovery
- your child can start to eat solid food straight away
- your child should drink plenty of their usual fluids. This should include breast or other milk feeds
- you should avoid giving your child fruit juice or fizzy drinks until the diarrhoea has stopped
- your doctor, may also recommend that your child drinks rehydration solution after each bout of diarrhoea

How long will my child be ill?

Preventing the spread of gastroenteritis.

- Hand washing is the best way to help stop other people getting gastroenteritis. You and/or your child should wash your hands with soap (liquid if possible) in warm running water and then dry them carefully:
 - after going to the toilet
 - after changing nappies

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- before touching food.

Your child should not:

- share his or her towels with anyone
- go to school or any other childcare facility until 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting
- swim in swimming pools until 2 weeks after the diarrhoea has stopped.

Diarrhoea often lasts for 5–7 days and in most children it will stop within 2 weeks. Vomiting often lasts for 1–2 days and in most children it will stop within 3 days. If your child's symptoms are taking longer to get better then you should contact a doctor.