

Vomiting

What is vomiting?

Vomiting (throwing up) is a symptom that is present in many illnesses. Vomiting may be caused by a virus or bacteria (germ) in food, food that “disagrees” with the stomach (too spicy, too rich, or new foods), or a blockage in the bowel (intestines).

Vomiting usually stops in 6 to 24 hours. With a viral illness, diarrhea often starts 8 to 12 hours after the start of vomiting and may continue for 5 to 7 days.

Vomiting can cause dehydration (getting “dried out”), which can be dangerous. The younger the child, the more quickly dehydration can happen.

How should I care for my child?

Watch for signs of dehydration. If your child shows signs of dehydration call the doctor.

Signs of moderate dehydration:

- no urine (or wet diaper) for 8 hours
- dry lips
- inside of mouth dry and sticky

Signs of severe dehydration:

- no tears when crying
- inside of the mouth is very dry (no saliva)
- eyes seem sunken
- weight loss
- listless (has little energy)
- hard to awaken
- confused
- weakness (hard to sit up or walk, floppy)

Home treatment for a child without dehydration:

Give oral re-hydration liquids to replace the fluid lost by vomiting. **If your baby is younger than 3 months**, call your clinic or on-call service to decide how serious the problem is, and whether you should have your baby seen by the doctor.

Best liquids to use:

Breast-fed infants who have only vomited 1 or 2 times should **continue nursing**. You may need to nurse for a shorter time on each breast and feed more often. If vomiting occurs 3 or more times, stop nursing and give an oral rehydration solution (Pedialyte® or another brand) as instructed below.

Pump your milk if unable to nurse, and store it in the freezer to give your baby later. As soon as your baby is able to keep liquids down, go back to your usual nursing schedule. (**Note:** It is okay to nurse even if you are sick—your milk has antibodies that may help your baby heal faster.)

For **formula-fed infants** give an oral rehydration solution such as Pedialyte® (you can buy them at some grocery stores and most drug stores without a prescription). Give 1 to 2 ounces ($\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup) every 10 to 15 minutes. If your baby cannot keep this amount down, try less (1 to 2 teaspoons) and give it more often. If your baby **cannot** keep these small amounts down, **call the clinic**.

If your baby does keep the liquid down, **slowly** increase the amount of the feeding and the time between servings. Double the amount in each feeding every hour. Continue frequent feedings until your baby can keep a normal amount down.

A common mistake is to give too much liquid rather than slowly increasing the amount. This can lead to more vomiting.

Some infants older than 6 months refuse the oral rehydration solution. In that case, continue small amounts of their regular liquids (except fruit juices). Start giving 1 or 2 ounces per feeding and feed more often. Do not give plain water.

It may not help to change formulas, but your doctor or nurse practitioner may suggest a trial.

Avoid fluids high in sugar and sweeteners such as fruit juices, soda, gelatin (Jell-O® or another brand) or diet drinks, because the type of sugar in them can make symptoms worse. Adult sport drinks have a different balance of salt and sugar and other electrolytes than young children need. They work well for older children.

For older children, or those who do not take the oral rehydration solution, you can use:

- flavored Pedialyte®, especially the frozen form
- small amounts of their usual fluids

Add solid foods as soon as the vomiting improves. Give your infant or child's regular foods as tolerated, but in smaller amounts and more often than usual meals.

Infants: Give baby food as tolerated.

Toddlers and older children—start with:

- applesauce, bananas
- cooked carrots
- complex carbohydrates such as cereal, potatoes, rice, yogurt
- lean meats such as chicken, turkey
- other fruits and vegetables as tolerated

- avoid fatty or greasy foods (fried foods, bacon, sausage), as they are harder to digest and may increase symptoms

Give larger amounts as tolerated. Children can often be back on their regular diet within 24 hours after vomiting stops.

When should I call the clinic?

Call if your child:

- refuses to drink
- is less than 12 months and vomits clear liquid drinks 3 or more times
- vomits for more than 8 hours
- is unable to progress to solid foods within 24 hours
- has a temperature higher than 101° F (38.3° C) rectally or 100° F (37.7° C) by mouth
- has a constant severe stomachache, stiff neck, or headache
- has vomit that looks like coffee grounds
- has vomit that is red, green, or yellow, and food given just before was not the same color
- vomits like “water shooting straight out of a hose”
- is vomiting and has **diabetes**
- takes daily medicines
- has had recent abdominal surgery or injury
- **call right away** for any signs of dehydration (listed on page 1)

Questions?

This sheet is not specific to your child, but provides general information. If your child also has diarrhea, see the education sheet, “Diarrhea.” If you have any questions, please call the clinic.

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