

## **Diarrhea and/or Vomiting for Adults**

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### **What causes diarrhea and/or vomiting?**

There are many causes. The most common is a virus.

The first signs are high fever and vomiting. The person may start to pass watery stools called diarrhea.

There are a lot of germs in the stool and/or vomit so be careful when cleaning up and wash your hands well and often.

Other less common causes of diarrhea and/or vomiting are bacteria or parasites. Your doctor or health care provider will assess and determine the cause.



### **What is dehydration?**

Dehydration is a problem caused by diarrhea and/or vomiting.

Dehydration is a lack of fluid in the body. A body needs water and salt to survive.

Diarrhea and vomiting that is not looked after the right way can lead to serious health problems and sometimes death.

If you have other health problems such as diabetes, kidney disease or heart problems, you also need to be careful and you may need to seek medical attention.

### **What are signs of dehydration?**

Signs of dehydration include:

- decreased amount of urinating (peeing) less than 4 times a day
- feeling thirsty
- dry skin, mouth and tongue, sunken eyes
- faster heart beat
- skin colour changes – skin may look grey
- slightly elevated temperature

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### Oral Rehydration

Oral rehydration is putting fluids back into the body. Oral rehydration solutions are exact mixtures of water and important nutrients. These solutions are still absorbed by the body even when vomiting.

You can buy oral rehydration solutions at the pharmacy (drug store) in ready-to-serve liquid preparations and special frozen products. **Talk to the pharmacist about the best product to get.** This depends on the age and size of the person with diarrhea and/or vomiting.



You can also drink sports drinks with caution to rehydrate. However, if you have a health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease or any medical condition, seek medical advice for your safety.

### Helpful Hints:

- Take or give small amounts often. For example, take or give small sips every 5 minutes.
- Slowly increase the amount as diarrhea and/or vomiting improves.
- Avoid plain water, sugar water, fruit juice, sweetened fruit drinks, pop, soda, sweetened or herbal tea, broth or rice water. These do not contain the correct amount of nutrients and can make the problem worse.
- Talk to your doctor or health care provider before using any over-the-counter medications to stop diarrhea and/or vomiting.
- If you have diabetes, follow your sick day plan as advised by your health care provider. You will have to check your blood sugar more often.

### Food and Drinks to Avoid

- ✗ fruit juice or sweetened fruit drinks
- ✗ fruit except applesauce and bananas
- ✗ carbonated drinks such as pop or soda
- ✗ sweetened tea, broth or rice water
- ✗ dairy products such as milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream for 3 days
- ✗ spicy foods such as curry, pepper, chilli, and pizza
- ✗ high fibre foods such as corn, cabbage and bran



### Remember

- If frequent diarrhea is occurring, do not take or offer plain water. Drinking water only may lead to low blood sugar or low sodium levels in the body and this can be dangerous.
- After 24 to 48 hours most people go back to their regular diets.
- When able begin adding food such as dry toast, crackers, chicken noodle soup or rice soup in small amounts. You can add salt to these foods if diet allows.
- Slowly increase the type and amount of food. Then try adding cooked potatoes, pasta, rice, chicken without skin, applesauce and bananas.
- Continue to have only small amounts of food every hour or so.
- It can take up to 10 days or longer to go back to a regular bowel pattern.

### When to contact your doctor or health care provider

#### Contact your doctor or health care provider when you have:

- bloody or black stools
- vomiting that continues for longer than 4 to 6 hours
- diarrhea and/or vomiting and a fever over 38.5 C or 101.5 F
- signs of dehydration
- stomach pains that get worse
- problems controlling blood sugar if you have diabetes
- you are worried, concerned or feel unwell

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