Vomiting and Diarrhea
Walker Health Center 312-4100

Gastroenteritis, a viral digestive tract infection, is a communicable illness with onset usually within a day or two of exposure. Acute symptoms generally last 24-48 hours.

The goal of managing vomiting and diarrhea is preventing dehydration and replacing electrolyte losses, as well as keeping the digestive system “quiet,” and avoiding certain foods, such as greasy, high-fat, dairy, or high-fiber foods that could potentiate the already irritated digestive tract.

Start with a clear liquid diet for 12-24 hours, which may include the following:
- Water
- Clear bullion (the instant cubes or granules are best and can be found in most soup aisles).
- Clear juices (apple, grape, cherry, or cranberry)....AVOID CITRUS
- Any flavor clear jello (you may eat it jellied or drink it in its liquid state)
- Light colored sodas (Sierra Mist, GingerAle, Sprite)
- Instant fruit-flavored drinks prepared from a powder (Kool-Aid)
- Popsicles
- Gatorade

Take fluids in small, frequent amounts. You should avoid coffee, colas, tea, or alcoholic beverages.

In addition to the dietary management of gastroenteritis and depending on the severity of the symptoms or situation, there are certain medications you may receive to help treat your symptoms. They should be taken as directed and preferable with the guidance of a healthcare professional.

Given this management, your symptoms should improve within 24-72 hours, at which time you may begin to include some bland solid foods in your diet as your appetite returns. It is important to note that too sudden a resumption of your “regular” diet may give you a recurrence of diarrhea or vomiting. You should still avoid spicy foods, greasy or fatty foods, or foods with a high-fiber content. Examples of bland foods include

- Toasted white bread with honey or clear jelly (no butter)
- Soda crackers/rice cakes
- Rice, cream of wheat or cream of rice cereal
- Plain cooked potatoes
- Non-greasy noodle soup
- Applesauce, bananas
- Baked or broiled fish or poultry without butter or fat
- Cooked carrots or peas

Your symptoms of diarrhea and/or vomiting should resolve. It may be a few days, however, before “normal” bowel movements resume.

Special Instruction:
Certain conditions require prompt medical attention:
- Acute abdominal pain unrelieved by passing a bowel movement or vomiting
- Fever over 103° not relieved by acetaminophen (Tylenol)
- Persistence of vomiting and/or diarrhea without gradual improvement despite dietary management
- The presence of blood in vomitus or bowel movements.

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