Gastroenteritis
(Vomiting, Diarrhea, and/or Dehydration)

Viral gastroenteritis is also known as stomach flu. This condition affects the stomach and intestinal tract. The illness typically lasts 3 to 8 days. Most people develop an immune response. This eventually gets rid of the virus. While this natural response develops, the virus can make you quite ill. The majority of those affected are young infants.

CAUSES
Diarrhea and vomiting are often caused by a virus. Medicines (*antibiotics*) that kill germs will not help unless there is also a germ (*bacterial*) infection.

SYMPTOMS
The most common symptom is diarrhea. This can cause severe loss of fluids (*dehydration*) and body salt (*electrolyte*) imbalance.

TREATMENT
Treatments for this illness are aimed at rehydration. Antidiarrheal medicines are not recommended. They do not decrease diarrhea volume and may be harmful. Usually, home treatment is all that is needed.

The most serious cases involve vomiting so severely that you are not able to keep down fluids taken by mouth (*orally*). In these cases, intravenous (IV) fluids are needed. Vomiting with viral gastroenteritis is common, but it will usually go away with treatment.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS
Small amounts of fluids should be taken frequently. Large amounts at one time may not be tolerated. Plain water may be harmful in infants and the elderly. Oral rehydration solutions (ORS) are available at pharmacies and grocery stores. ORS replace water and important electrolytes in proper proportions. Sports drinks are not as effective as ORS and may be harmful due to sugars worsening diarrhea.

- As a general guideline for children, replace any new fluid losses from diarrhea and/or vomiting with ORS as follows:
  - If your child **weighs 22 pounds or under** (10 kg or less), give 60-120 mL (1/4 - 1/2 cup or 2 - 4 ounces) of ORS for each diarrheal stool or vomiting episode.
  - If your child **weighs more than 22 pounds** (more than 10 kgs), give 120-240 mL (1/2 - 1 cup or 4 - 8 ounces) of ORS for each diarrheal stool or vomiting episode.

- In a child with vomiting, it may be helpful to give the above ORS replacement in 5 mL (1 teaspoon) amounts every 5 minutes, then increase as tolerated.
- While correcting for dehydration, children should eat normally. However, foods high in sugar should be avoided because this may worsen diarrhea. Large amounts of carbonated soft drinks, juice, gelatin desserts, and other highly sugared drinks should be avoided.
- After correction of dehydration, other liquids that are appealing to the child may be added. Children should drink small amounts of fluids frequently and fluids should be increased as tolerated.
- Adults should eat normally while drinking more fluids than usual. Drink small amounts of fluids frequently and increase as tolerated. Drink enough water and fluids to keep your urine clear or pale yellow. Broths, weak decaffeinated tea, lemon-lime soft drinks (allowed to go flat), and ORS replace fluids and electrolytes.

Avoid:

- Carbonated drinks.
- Juice.
- Extremely hot or cold fluids.
- Caffeine drinks.
- Fatty, greasy foods.
- Alcohol.
- Tobacco.
- Too much intake of anything at one time.
- Gelatin desserts.

- Probiotics are active cultures of beneficial bacteria. They may lessen the amount and number of diarrheal stools in adults. Probiotics can be found in yogurt with active cultures and in supplements.
- **Wash your hands well to avoid spreading bacteria and viruses.**
- Antidiarrheal medicines are not recommended for infants and children.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver. **Do not give aspirin to children.**
- For adults with dehydration, ask your caregiver if you should continue all prescribed and over-the-counter medicines.
- If your caregiver has given you a follow-up appointment, it is very important to keep that appointment. Not keeping the appointment could result in a lasting (*chronic*) or permanent injury and disability. If there is any problem keeping the appointment, you must call to reschedule.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You are unable to keep fluids down.
- There is no urine output in 6 to 8 hours or there is only a small amount of very dark urine.
- You develop shortness of breath.
- There is blood in the vomit (may look like coffee grounds) or stool.
- Belly (*abdominal*) pain develops, increases, or localizes.
- There is persistent vomiting or diarrhea.
- You or your child has an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.
- Your baby is older than 3 months with a rectal temperature of 102º F (38.9º C) or higher.
- **Your baby is 3 months old or younger with a rectal temperature of 100.4º F (38º C) or higher.**

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

Some of this information courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Food Illness Fact Sheets.

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