



Dartmouth College Health Service

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Gastrointestinal Symptoms – Treatment and Prevention

One of the most common causes of vomiting is a viral infection of the intestines. This usually lasts 1 – 2 days and may be accompanied by diarrhea and/or cramping abdominal pain. Vomiting can also be caused by bacterial infections, bacterial toxins (food poisoning), food intolerance and emotional upset. Vomiting may be accompanied by diarrhea and by fever.

The goal of treatment is to maintain adequate water, sodium and potassium in the body. Clear liquids are rapidly absorbed from the intestinal tract and therefore are the recommended treatment.

Clear liquids for Day 1 of your illness:

- **Tea**
- **Gingerale**
- **Jello**
- **Water/ice chips**
- **Popsicles**
- **Clear broth**
- **Gatorade or Powerade**

Begin with small amounts of fluids, an ounce or two at a time, every 15 – 20 minutes. Once you can tolerate this amount, gradually increase your intake.

If you have a fever >100.0 F, you may take Acetaminophen (Tylenol) according to package directions.

If you are feeling better on Day 2, continue with a liquid diet and add bland solid food. You may add the following: bananas, bread, crackers, applesauce, dry cereal, rice soups.

Avoid all milk and milk products until vomiting and diarrhea has ceased. If you are feeling better on Day 3, add other foods to your diet, as tolerated. **Fried foods, most raw fruits and vegetables, caffeine, alcohol, coarse breads and cereals, and highly seasoned foods may cause distress.** Food tolerances may vary with individuals.

Prevention: The best way to help prevent gastrointestinal illness is good hand washing and hygiene.

Wash your hands carefully with soap and water ---

- Especially after using the toilet, and
- Always before eating, preparing or handling food.
- Alcohol-based sanitizers can be used in addition to hand-washing but they should not be used as a substitute for washing with soap and water.
- Limit social contact with others while you are having active symptoms to avoid spreading the illness

If any of the following pertains to you, you may have more than a viral infection. We recommend calling the Appointment Office (603) 646-9401 to schedule a consult with a clinician.

1. Blood in your vomit or stool
2. Vomiting for more than 24 hours
3. Stools are not down in frequency and water content by Day 4
4. Abdominal pain is severe or lasts more than 2 hours
5. Signs of dehydration occur, including dry mouth, no urination for 8 hours, or production of dark, highly concentrated urine, dizziness or lightheadedness when standing or walking
6. Persistent fever

The Dick's House Nurse Advice Line is available 24/7. Please call (603) 646-9440 if you have questions or concerns.