

GASTROENTERITIS

(Stomach Flu)



BASIC INFORMATION

Irritation and inflammation of the stomach and intestines. Gastroenteritis is a general term and is often used when there is a nonspecific, uncertain, or unknown cause. The disorder can affect all ages, but is most severe in young children (1-5 years old). Adults usually have mild cases, sometimes with no symptoms.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Diarrhea is the main symptom, and, sometimes, the only one.
- Diarrhea may range from 2-3 loose stools to many watery stools.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Stomach cramps, pain, or tenderness.
- Fever or chills.
- Appetite loss.
- Weakness.
- Dehydration.

CAUSES

- Viral infections are the most common cause. They are spread by contact with an infected person or by touching an object that has germs on it. Contaminated food or water is another source for infection.
- Other causes are bacterial or parasitic infections, food-borne toxins, shellfish and marine animal poisoning, food intolerance, drug-caused diarrhea, and colitis.



RISK INCREASES WITH

- Children in daycare centers.
- Crowded living or working conditions.
- Older adults in nursing homes.
- Schools, dormitories, camps, or cruise ships
- People with weak immune systems due to illness or drugs.
- Use of drugs, such as antibiotics, laxatives, or antacids.
- Contaminated food or water.
- Travel to foreign countries.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- No specific preventive measures.
- Wash hands often to prevent spread of any germs.
- Don't share eating utensils or towels.
- Use safety precautions in storing and cooking foods.
- When traveling in foreign countries, take care to eat food and drink water that is known to be safe.
- Vaccines against some viruses are being studied.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The prognosis is excellent. Diarrhea and other symptoms usually clear up in 2-5 days. Adults may feel somewhat weak and fatigued for about a week.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Serious dehydration that requires special treatment. Other complications are rare.

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DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT GENERAL MEASURES

- In most cases, this disorder will be self-treated at home. Call your doctor if symptoms are severe or if they cause you any concern.
- Your doctor may do a physical exam. Medical tests may include studies of blood and stool.
- Treatment usually involves rest and fluids. There is no specific drug for viral infections.
- It is not necessary to keep persons with gastroenteritis away from others in the family or household. Try to avoid close contact if possible.
- Hospital care may be needed, if dehydration is severe.

MEDICATIONS

- Drugs are usually not needed for treatment. If symptoms are severe or prolonged, you may take anti-nauseant and anti-diarrhea drugs.
- Some infections may require specific drug treatment.
- If a drug you take is the cause of the problem, you may be advised to change drugs or stop taking the drug.

ACTIVITY

Get extra rest until diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and fever are improved. Be sure to have access to a toilet or bedpan.

DIET

- Suck ice chips or drink small amounts of clear fluids often. Replace lost fluids and electrolytes with products such as re-hydration fluids or powders for adults or children from your local pharmacy.
- Once the symptoms improve, try a diet of complex carbohydrates (rice, wheat, potatoes, bread, cereal, and lean meat, such as chicken). Milk and dairy products usually do not need to be limited.
- Avoid high-sugar foods or fatty foods for a few days.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- Symptoms of gastroenteritis last longer than 2 days.
- Symptoms continue or worsen after treatment.
- Blood or mucus appears in the stool.
- You have any other questions or concerns, call Canadian Medical Care (+420) 235 360 133, CMC in The Park (+420) 272 913 593, or after hours (+420) 724 300 303.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- www.sja.org.uk
- www.redcross.org.uk

SOURCE

- Moore, Stephen. Griffith's Instructions for Patients, 7th Edition. Elsevier: 2005.

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