

GASTROENTERITIS

(Stomach Flu)

Information From Your Health Care Provider



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Gastroenteritis is an irritation and inflammation of the stomach and intestines. It 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 to 5 years). Adults usually have mild cases, sometimes with no symptoms.

FREQUENT SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Diarrhea is the main symptom, and sometimes, the only one. Diarrhea may range from 2 or 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
- Weak immune system 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 to 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.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- In most cases, this disorder will be self-treated at home. Call your health care provider if symptoms are severe or if they cause you any concern.
- Your health care provider 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. Antibiotics do not work for viral infections.
- If symptoms are severe or prolonged, your health care provider may recommend nonprescription drugs for vomiting or diarrhea.
- 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 Pedialyte for infants and children, and diluted rehydration fluids (e.g., Gatorade) for adults.
- 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.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page