



What to do when the “stomach bug” hits.

We've all been there: you get that queasy feeling in your stomach and the next thing you know you're running for the bathroom. Acute gastroenteritis, commonly known as the "stomach bug", strikes quickly and leaves us helplessly hugging the toilet. It's most often caused by a number of contagious viruses and will spread through schools and households rapidly. These viruses are generally transmitted by coming into contact with infected stool, making children the group most likely to spread them since they may not do a great job of washing their hands after using the toilet.

The best way to prevent infection is to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, and before meals.

What are the causes?

There are many viruses which can cause acute gastroenteritis with varying degrees of severity. Rotavirus in particular is well known for causing severe disease that can potentially lead to hospitalization. Thankfully, there is an effective vaccine available to protect young infants against Rotavirus infection.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms of the stomach bug are nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, but some people will also experience fever and abdominal pain. The vomiting phase tends to last 1-2 days but, unfortunately the diarrhea may last up to 7-10 days.

What is the treatment?

Most people recover from acute gastroenteritis without treatment. At home care for acute gastroenteritis primarily involves rest and consistent intake of small amounts of clear fluids. The best choice to prevent dehydration is an electrolyte replacement drink, which can be found in most grocery stores and pharmacies. Most often an oral rehydration solution like Pedialyte, or a similar brand, is recommended for children under one year of age. Older children and adults should sip water or diluted sports drinks such as Gatorade or Powerade.

Once the vomiting phase subsides, start to offer small crackers or similar bland foods. The BRAT diet (bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast) is commonly recommended, but broth-based soup is also a good option. Items to avoid in the initial recovery period include milk, fruit juices or other sugary drinks which can make diarrhea worse. Also hold off on spicy or greasy foods. Gradually increase the amount and variety of foods offered over several days.



Eat Your Greens with Dr. Black | plant-based nutrition for the whole family

In some cases, your doctor may prescribe a medication to relieve nausea so that patients can keep fluids down. Medication is usually not prescribed or recommended for diarrhea, as it is best to let the diarrhea resolve naturally.

When to seek medical attention:

In very young infants, or when symptoms are more severe, there is a risk of dehydration and electrolyte imbalance resulting from fluid lost through vomiting and diarrhea. Monitor how frequently your child urinates: fewer wet diapers or trips to the bathroom to pee may be a sign of dehydration. Other worrisome symptoms include high fever, listlessness, or blood in the stool. See your doctor or go the nearest emergency room if these symptoms are present.

Thank you to contributing author: Dr. Jade Jurak