

Diarrhoea & vomiting

Vomiting in adults is not usually a sign of anything serious and tends to only last a couple of days. Vomiting is the body's way of getting rid of harmful substances from the stomach, or it may be a reaction to something that has irritated the gut.



One of the most common causes of vomiting in adults is gastroenteritis. This is an infection of the gut usually caused by bacteria or a virus, like a norovirus. Gastroenteritis also causes diarrhoea and it's normal to have some mild abdominal cramps or pain during an episode of diarrhoea and vomiting. Your immune system will usually fight off the infection after a few days.

However, vomiting can sometimes be a sign of something more serious, like a blockage in your bowel or kidney stones so if you are feeling very unwell or are worried about your vomiting, trust your instincts and call your GP.

Diarrhoea is passing loose or watery faeces more than three times a day. It affects almost everyone from time to time and is usually nothing to worry about. A common cause in both children and adults is gastroenteritis, an infection of the bowel. Gastroenteritis may also be caused by:

- A virus, like a norovirus or rotavirus
- Bacteria, which is often found in contaminated food
- A parasite

Bouts of diarrhoea in adults may also be brought on by anxiety or drinking too much coffee or alcohol. Diarrhoea may also be a side effect of a medication.

Both vomiting and diarrhoea can cause dehydration. Symptoms of dehydration in adults include:

- Lacking energy or feeling tired
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Feeling light-headed
- Dizziness, especially when standing up
- Dry tongue
- Sunken eyes
- Muscle cramps
- Rapid heartbeat



For more information, help and support go to www.choosewellmanchester.org.uk or visit NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk

Choose the right care

Looking after yourself

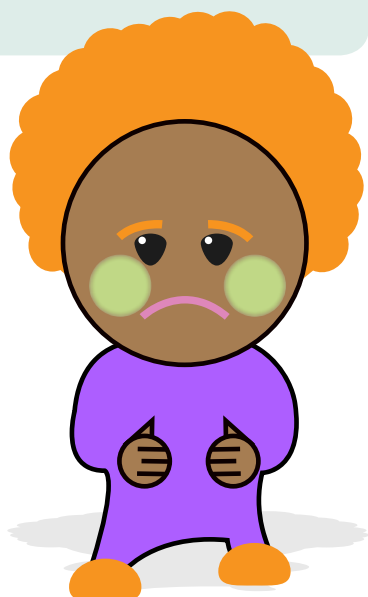
The most important thing you can do when vomiting is to keep taking small sips of fluid so you don't become dehydrated. Drink water, squash, diluted fruit juice or semi-skimmed milk. A sweet drink can be useful for replacing lost sugar and a salty snack, like a packet of crisps, can help replace lost salt. You may find that ginger helps to relieve your nausea and vomiting. Try drinking fresh ginger stewed in a mug of hot water.

In adults, diarrhoea caused by gastroenteritis will usually clear up in two to four days when the infection has cleared.

Taking antidiarrhoeal medicine is usually not necessary unless it is important that you shorten the length of time your diarrhoea lasts (for example, if you need to take a long-haul flight). Children should not take this medicine.

It's important to avoid spreading the infection to others:


- Wash hands thoroughly after going to the toilet
- Ensure toilets and washbasins are cleaned regularly
- Do not share towels/flannels etc
- Wash any soiled clothing separately at high temperature
- Minimise contact with others until symptoms have stopped



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Choose the right care

What to do next...




Choose care at home if...

- You have been vomiting for less than 24 hours
- You have had diarrhoea for less than 72 hours



Choose your GP or GP out-of-hours service if...

- You have been vomiting uncontrollably for more than 24 hours
- You have a history of diabetes and are vomiting uncontrollably
- You have not been able to keep down fluids for 12 hours or more
- Your vomit is green. In this case you are probably bringing up bile, a fluid the digestive system uses to digest foods. This suggests you may have a blockage in your bowel
- There is blood in your vomit or what looks like coffee granules – this could be a sign of a peptic ulcer
- You have not passed urine for 9 hours or more
- You also have severe stomach pain
- You have recently been treated in hospital
- You have recently been treated with antibiotics
- You have returned from abroad within the last seven days
- You have diarrhoea that has blood in it or is black (like tar)
- You have diarrhoea and persistent vomiting
- You have unexplained weight loss
- You have bleeding from your rectum (back passage)
- You have passed large volumes of very watery diarrhoea - you may be at risk of dehydration (see below)
- You have symptoms at night that are disturbing your sleep
- Your diarrhoea lasts longer than a week



Call 999 A&E if...

- Vomiting becomes more frequent or contains blood
- You feel faint/light headed when sitting or standing
- You have had a recent injury to the head or abdomen
- You start to have chest pain
- You have increasing neck pain or stiffness
- There are any changes in your level of alertness (drowsy, irritable etc)
- You have a spotty, purple-red rash anywhere on your body that does not disappear if you roll a glass tumbler over it