

Patient Information: Gastroenteritis



What is Gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is an infection of the gastrointestinal tract (stomach and bowel), it is caused by a range of viruses and bacteria that lead to acute inflammation. This can lead to nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, and pain in the abdominal area. Other symptoms can include general aching throughout the body and joints, loss of appetite, fever, and in rare cases blood may be visible in the stool.

How did I get it?

Many forms of gastroenteritis are highly infectious, so can be spread via the faecal-oral route - when viruses or bacteria found in faeces (stools) are transferred to your mouth.

Infection may arise from poorly cooked food, cooked food that has been left too long at room temperature or from uncooked food such as shellfish.

Poor hygiene - such as not washing hands after going to the toilet, can spread viruses and bacteria to whatever they touch - e.g. kitchen utensils and food. If you eat from these utensils or eat contaminated food you might swallow some of these viruses or bacteria, leading to gastroenteritis.

How is it treated?

Mild cases:

The symptoms will resolve themselves within a few days, and do not require admission to hospital. General advice would be:

- Drinking plenty of fluids (water, squash, diluted juices rather than tea or coffee)
- Taking an "Oral-rehydration Solution" - ask your pharmacist for further advice.
- Avoid returning to work or going to places where you may pass on the infection to others for 48 hours after passing a normal (solid) stool
- Measures to prevent spread of infection; hands should be washed thoroughly with soap and water; not sharing towels and flannels; wash soiled linen separately from other clothes; toilet seats and bathroom surfaces should be cleaned at least daily with hot water and detergent.
- Anti-diarrhoeal drugs are not usually necessary for the management of gastroenteritis, and should be avoided if there is blood and/or mucus in the stools, or high fever.
- Antibiotics are not recommended for adults where the cause of diarrhoea is unknown.

Moderate-Severe Cases:

Seek medical advice as soon as possible if:

- You have had symptoms for more than 4 days with no improvement
- You are unable to keep any fluids down for more than 24 hours
- You have severe abdominal pain

You may need hospital admission for further tests and Intravenous hydration

The main complication of gastroenteritis is becoming dehydrated (your body becoming short of fluid), which can lead to damage to your kidneys.

Additional Advice

If you have diabetes:

- Keep taking insulin – even if you don't feel like eating. In some cases you may need to alter your dose – your diabetes team or GP will be able to advise on this.
- Test your blood more often, at least every four hours. If you don't test your blood glucose levels at home you should be mindful of signs of hyperglycaemia - high blood sugar.
- Stay well hydrated. Have plenty of unsweetened drinks to avoid dehydration, and eat little and often.
- If your blood glucose level is 15mmol/l or more, check urine/blood for ketones. If ketones are present, seek medical advice.
- If you don't feel like eating, are feeling sick or can't keep any food down, replace meals with snacks or drinks containing carbohydrates, which will provide energy. Try to sip sugary drinks or suck on glucose tablets or sweets.
- If you are persistently vomiting, or unable to keep fluids down get medical help as soon as possible.

If you are taking any of the medication listed below:

CAPTOPRIL, ENALAPRIL, LISINOPRIL, PERINDOPRIL, RAMIPRIL, CANDESARTAN, LOSARTAN, IRBESARTAN, VALSARTAN, FUROSEMIDE, BENDROFLUMETHIAZIDE, SPIRONOLACTONE, INDAPAMIDE.

The above medications are good for some medical conditions, but if your body becomes dehydrated these medications can stop your kidneys from working normally.

If you develop diarrhoea or vomiting and are not able to keep in a normal amount of fluid, you should temporarily stop taking the above medication.

Once you feel better and can drink normally you should restart your medicine - for most people this is within 48 hours.

If you are unwell for longer than 48hrs seek medical advice.

If you have been admitted into hospital for dehydration - the hospital doctors or pharmacists will advise you on when to restart these medications.

What do I do if I become worried about my condition?

If at any point you are concerned, please see your GP or contact the NHS 111 service.

The information given in this leaflet is not intended to replace the advice given to you by your doctor or the service looking after you.