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Nausea, Vomiting & Diarrhoea

WHEN IS VOMITING AND DIARRHEA CONSIDERED A MEDICAL PROBLEM?

Vomiting and diarrhoea lasting four to six hours becomes a medical concern.

WHY ARE MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS CONCERNED ABOUT VOMITING AND DIARRHEA?

Vomiting and diarrhoea may cause dehydration and an electrolyte imbalance. If there is too much loss of fluid, dehydration may occur. Severe dehydration (too much loss of fluid) may require treatment in the hospital.

WHAT CAUSES VOMITING AND DIARRHEA?

Most vomiting and diarrhoea is caused by “gastroenteritis” or simply, an infection of the gastrointestinal tract. Some patients may have abdominal pain. Other causes can be ear, throat (strep) or kidney infections. A problem such as intestinal blockage or appendicitis may cause vomiting.

Sometimes bloody vomiting occurs when the stomach wall is stretched with retching and some of the small blood vessels are torn. **A few small streaks of blood are not of great concern, but larger amounts should be checked by a physician.**

HOW DO MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS TREAT VOMITING AND DIARRHEA?

The most important treatment is a special diet to let the stomach rest. Since most cases are caused by viruses, antibiotics will not be of any help. It is very important to follow diet instructions carefully.

If vomiting, do not eat or drink anything for four hours; then:

Start with small amounts of ice chips.

Drink two to three ounces of liquids each half hour for one to two hours, then increase to three to four ounces each half hour for one to two hours.

If after six hours there is no further vomiting, you may drink as much as you would like. Cold fluids are generally better tolerated. If diarrhoea is present, drink room temperature liquids.

If vomiting begins again, return to ice chips and small amounts of liquids.

WHAT ARE THE BEST LIQUIDS TO DRINK?

Cool drinks

Gatorade (diluted half-strength with water)

Jell-O water – add one package to a quart of water. Red Jell-O can make the bowel movements appear to be bloody.

Ginger ale, cola beverages – but stir out all bubbles first

Popsicles

Ice chips

HOW LONG CAN I EXPECT IT TO LAST?

Vomiting usually disappears after 24 hours but may last longer, and the diarrhoea that often is associated with it may last for several days.

Keep on clear liquids for at least 24 hours, and then progress to solid foods such as bananas, rice, raw apples, saltine crackers, toast and jelly. Avoid all dairy products until the vomiting and diarrhoea resolve.

WHEN SHOULD I SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION?

Excessive drowsiness.

Headache or neck stiffness.

Sharp or constant abdominal pain.

Bloody bowel movements.

Vomiting that continues even after following the instructions on this sheet.

Diarrhoea not improving after two to three days.

Absence of urination >10 - 12 hours.