

YOUR HEALTH

DIARRHOEA & VOMITING



This help sheet answers some frequently asked questions about diarrhoea and vomiting.

What causes diarrhoea and vomiting?

Diarrhoea and vomiting may be caused by gastroenteritis, which is an infection caused by a number of different germs. The most common cause is viruses; usually norovirus.

What are the symptoms?

You may experience the following:

- Diarrhoea
- Vomiting
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain
- Fever

Is it infectious?

All cases of gastroenteritis should be regarded as potentially infectious.

It can sometimes be spread directly from person to person, especially where there is a breakdown in personal hygiene, for example, not cleaning hands after using the toilet.

It can be spread if someone who is ill prepares food for others. People who work with food present a particularly high risk of spreading the illness and should be excluded from work or school until they are well and have formed bowel movements.

The germs responsible for gastroenteritis may be present in the bowel without causing symptoms. These may be in bowel movements for long periods, even after recovery from illness.

However, transmission is very unlikely if good personal hygiene is practised, such as handwashing.

What is the incubation period?

The incubation period is the time that you were first exposed to the germ to the time that you started having symptoms.

This varies from a few hours to a few days, depending on the germ involved and how much infected food was eaten, if food is implicated as a source.

Normal incubation periods:

Campylobacter - Up to 10 days
Giardia - 7-10 days
Salmonella - 6-72 hours
Shigellosis - 1-7 days
Norovirus - 12-48 hours

DIARRHOEA & VOMITING

What is the treatment?

Most people will get better with no treatment.

For some infections, antibiotics may even increase the length of the illness.

You should drink plenty of clear fluids to replace any fluid lost. Water or tea (without milk) is good.

You may drink non-fizzy fruit drinks (however, these are not recommended for children, as it may worsen the problem of dehydration).

Precautions

Attention to personal hygiene is very important.

Wash your hands with soap and water, rinse and dry them after going to the toilet and before eating or handling food. Towels must not be shared.

- Visitors are encouraged to wash their hands when entering and leaving The Hospice and day therapy centres.
 - In general, people should stay away from work or school until they have been free of symptoms for 48 hours and feel well.
 - People who handle food as part of their work should check with their employers and GP before returning to work.
 - Visitors with symptoms should not visit until they are symptom free for 48 hours.
-
- Nursing staff will wear plastic aprons and gloves when attending to your needs and when disposing of bedpans or urinals.
 - Regular cleaning of the Inpatient Unit will be carried out with particular attention to shared facilities, for example, toilets.
 - Nursing staff will ensure that all equipment is appropriately cleaned between patients.