

Let's Talk About...

Vomiting

What is vomiting and what causes it?

Vomiting (throwing up) is when the body forcefully gets rid of what ever is in the stomach through the mouth or nose. It is often a sign that your child is ill. Vomiting can be caused by:

- A stomach virus
- An unhealthy diet (too many sweets and fats)
- Food poisoning
- Appendicitis [uh-pen-deh-SITE-is] (an inflamed appendix)
- An intestinal blockage (rare)

Babies often have wet burps, which are not the same as vomiting. They burp only small amounts of food and don't feel or act ill. Wet burps can be caused by swallowing air, becoming overexcited, or eating too much. Wet burps may also occur if you burp your baby a certain way or if they have a food intolerance (the body doesn't accept the food).

Vomiting and food poisoning

Food poisoning is caused by bacteria (germs) that grow in food. To prevent food poisoning:

- Be careful preparing and storing dairy foods, meat, poultry (chicken and other birds), eggs, fish, seafood, sprouts, and melons.
- Never use food from dented, cracked, or bulging cans.
- Before preparing food, and after handling raw food, wash your hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds.

When should I call my child's doctor?

Call your child's doctor if they have:

- Any blood in their vomit
- Green, red, black, or yellow vomit
- Severe belly (abdominal) pain or a swollen belly
- A fever above 104°F or 40° C (children), or 100.4°F or 38° C (infants)
- A severe headache
- Diarrhea (especially infants)

Call right away if they are very sleepy and unresponsive or have been taking liquids only for more than 1 day.

- Thoroughly clean counters, equipment, utensils, and cutting boards before preparing food, and immediately after preparing raw food.
- Clean poultry, fruits, and vegetables well before preparing them.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
- Don't keep foods at room temperature for more than 2 hours.
- Use home-cooked leftovers within 72 hours and take-out food and restaurant leftovers within 48 hours.
- Reheat leftovers only once.
- **If in doubt, throw it out!**

It can be hard to tell the difference between food poisoning and a stomach virus. A child with food poisoning often vomits constantly and also has constant diarrhea. They will also look and feel ill and weak. **If you think your child has food poisoning, call their doctor or the Poison Control Center (800.222.1222) right away.**

Vomiting and gastroesophageal reflux (GER)

Gastroesophageal [gas-troh-eh-sof-eh-GEE-uhl] **reflux (GER)** is sometimes called **regurgitation** [ree-gur-jeh-TAY-shun].

It occurs when the muscle at the top of the stomach relaxes. This allows the contents of the stomach to flow back into the esophagus and mouth. It usually happens when a baby has a full stomach after being fed. A small amount of reflux is normal in babies. To help keep this from happening:

- Burp your baby often during feedings
- Hold your baby upright as much as possible during feedings and for about 30 minutes after the feeding
- Feed your child often with smaller amounts of food

Many children outgrow regurgitation by 18 months.

Vomiting and appendicitis

Appendicitis is a less common cause of vomiting. Signs of appendicitis include:

- Constant pain usually felt first around the belly button that moves to the lower-right abdomen
- Vomiting (after complaining of pain)
- Diarrhea
- Fussiness (in small children)
- Fever
- Refusing to eat or walk

If you think your child might have appendicitis, take them to the doctor or emergency room right away.

How is vomiting treated?

If your child is vomiting, **stop feeding them for 1 hour to let their stomach rest.** Slowly give them clear liquids. These may include:

- An electrolyte drink such as Pedialyte (for children 2 years and younger) or Gatorade (for older children)
- Plain or gelatin water
- Clear carbonated drinks such as Sprite



Make sure your child takes a few sips of liquid every 15 to 30 minutes. If they don't vomit, gradually increase the amount of liquid.

If they can keep clear liquids down for 8 hours without vomiting, give your child bland solid foods appropriate for their age. These may include:

- Soda crackers
- Dry toast
- Cooked cereals
- Bananas
- Rice
- Applesauce
- Pasta

If your child vomits after any of these steps, start over again with clear liquids. Check your child for signs of dehydration.

What are the signs of dehydration?

Dehydration [dee-hy-DRAY-shun] occurs when your child is low on body fluids. Signs of dehydration include:

- Not peeing (urinating) very much or their urine is dark yellow
- Sunken soft spot on top of a baby's head
- Unusual tiredness
- No urine for 12 hours or more. A baby younger than 1 year old should have 6 to 8 wet diapers in a 24-hour period. An older child should urinate at least every 6 to 8 hours.
- Sunken or dry eyes (no tears)
- Dry mouth (no spit)
- Dry or wrinkled skin

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