

Let's Talk About...

Vomiting

Vomiting (throwing up) is the complete and forceful emptying of stomach contents through the mouth or nose. Vomiting is a sign that your child is ill. Some causes of vomiting are a stomach virus, an unhealthy diet, or more rarely, problems like food poisoning, gastroesophageal reflux (GER), or appendicitis.

Why is my child vomiting?

Babies often have wet burps. These are different from vomiting. With wet burps, your child does not feel or act ill. Only small amounts of food (usually less than one teaspoon) are lost. Wet burps can be normal or be caused by swallowing air, over-excitement, overfeeding, burping technique, or food intolerance (the body doesn't accept the food).

In older children (toddlers to adolescents), vomiting is often caused by stomach viruses, an unhealthy diet (too many sweets and fats), or even food poisoning.

It is hard to tell the difference between food poisoning and a stomach virus. Vomiting from food poisoning often happens with diarrhea and they both happen constantly. A child with food poisoning will look and feel very ill and weak. If you think your child has food poisoning, call your doctor or the Poison Control Center 800-222-1222 immediately.

What causes food poisoning and how can I prevent it?

Food poisoning is caused by bacteria that grows in food. As a parent or guardian, it is important to be careful when you prepare and store certain foods (dairy foods, meat, poultry (chicken or other birds), eggs, fish, seafood, sprouts and melons). The bacteria in food can be killed if you properly care for your food.

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

What is gastroesophageal reflux (GER)?

Gastroesophageal reflux is a less common cause of vomiting. Frequent spitting up, in an otherwise healthy baby may be due to gastroesophageal (GAS-trow-a-sofa-GEE-ul) reflux (GER). GER happens when a muscle at the top of the stomach is weak and allows the stomach contents to flow back into the esophagus and mouth. A small amount of reflux is normal in infants. Usually it happens with a full stomach after being fed. Many children outgrow this by 18 months. You can help reduce GER by burping your child frequently during feedings, holding your baby upright as much as possible during feedings and for about 30 minutes after the feeding is done, and

feeding your child frequently with smaller amounts of food.

Can vomiting be a sign of appendicitis?

Appendicitis is a less common cause of vomiting. If your child is vomiting and complains about constant pain in the lower right part of her belly, this could be a sign of appendicitis.

With appendicitis your child would have pain first and then start vomiting (in the flu, they vomit first before pain). The pain is usually felt first around the belly button, and after several hours, it may be worse in the lower right side. Other common signs are fever, won't eat, and diarrhea. Small children may be fussy and might not want to move around. If you think that your child might have appendicitis, take him to the doctor or emergency room as soon as possible.

How should I treat vomiting?

- 1 Stop feeding your child for one hour to let his stomach rest.
- 2 Start giving clear liquids slowly. If your child is less than two years old, give him Pedialyte® or Ricelyte®. They have a good balance of water, minerals, and calories.
- 3 If your child is more than two years old, or he will not drink Pedialyte®, give him other clear liquids (such as flat Coke® or 7-Up®, water, Gatorade®, or Jell-O® water). Make sure your child takes a few sips of liquid every 15–30 minutes. If he does not vomit, gradually increase the amount of liquid.
- 4 If after eight hours your child is still drinking liquids without vomiting, begin giving bland solid foods appropriate for your child's age. These may include soda crackers, dry toast, cooked cereals, bananas, rice, apple sauce, and pasta.
- 5 If your child vomits after any of these steps, start over again with clear liquids.

- 6 Check your child for signs of dehydration (see signs of dehydration)

When should I call my child's doctor?

Your child is dehydrated. Common signs of dehydration include:

- A small amount of urine (pee) or dark-yellow colored urine. A baby less than one year old should have 6 to 8 wet diapers in a 24-hour period. An older child will usually urinate every 6 to 8 hours.
- Unusual tiredness.
- Sunken or dry eyes (no tears).

These are more serious signs:

- Sunken soft spot on top of a baby's head.
- Dry mouth (no spit).
- Dry or wrinkled skin.
- No urine for 12 hours or more.
- Your child is very sleepy and unresponsive.
- Your child stays on a liquid diet for more than one day.
- Your child has blood in any vomit.
- Your child has green, red, black, or yellow vomit.
- Your child has severe abdominal pain or swelling.
- Your child has a fever above 104°F (40°C) or your infant has a fever above 100.4°C (38.0°C).
- Your child has a severe headache.
- Your child has diarrhea, especially if your child is an infant.