

Pediatric Pointers

by Dr. Joseph T. Bell
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It seems like this winter has been a very tough year for flu and stomach viruses. One of the main symptoms that has gone along with these two illnesses has been vomiting. Vomiting is the forceful ejection of a large portion of the stomach's contents through the mouth. It occurs when strong stomach contractions push against a closed stomach outlet, forcing food upward through the food tube and out of the mouth. This is different from spitting up which is the effortless spitting of one or two mouth fulls of stomach contents that is commonly seen in babies less than one year of age.

Most vomiting is caused by a viral infection of the stomach or if a child eats something that does not agree with their stomach. Lots of times vomiting caused by a virus is also accompanied by diarrhea. Vomiting usually stops in 12-24 hours as the virus begins to leave the body. There are some simple recommendations that can be done at home to help kids with vomiting. The first is to give clear liquids without solids for about 8-12 hours. No milk should be given during that time. For vomiting without diarrhea, the best fluid is usually water or ice chips. For older children, soft drinks or kool-aid are acceptable. The key is to give small amounts until the vomiting subsides. The one-swallow-at-a-time approach rarely fails.

After a child has gone 8-12 hours without vomiting, bland foods can be given if the child is hungry for solids. For older children, start with foods such as saltine crackers, white bread, soups

such as chicken noodle soup, rice, and mashed potatoes. The child usually can be back on a normal diet within 24 hours after the vomiting has stopped. Not eating much solid food for a few days will not hurt the child as long as they are drinking fluids.

For bottle fed infants less than one year of age a good liquid to drink is Pedialyte or RiceLyc. This could be given for 8-12 hours. After this period of time without vomiting the child can return to regular formula. Once the vomiting has subsided for at least 8 hours, infants can get back to eating cereal and strained bananas and can return to a normal diet within 1-2 days after the vomiting starts.

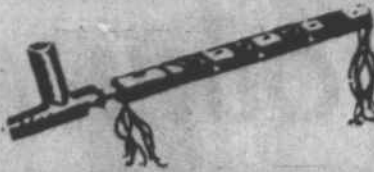
For breast feed babies, the key is to provide breast milk in smaller amounts than usual. This would mean feeding the baby for a shorter period of time on one breast instead of both. After a baby has gone 8 hours without vomiting, the child can return to nursing on both sides. If the vomiting continues despite shorter periods of breastfeeding, the child should be placed on water or Pedialyte. As soon as four hours has passed without vomiting, the child may return to nursing, but again in smaller amounts.

It is important during the first eight hours of vomiting to discontinue all unnecessary medications for at least eight hours. Oral medications can irritate the stomach and make vomiting worse. If a child has a very high fever you can use Tylenol suppositories instead of giving it by mouth.

The key to handling vomiting in a small child is to be patient. A

common error is to give as much clear fluids as the child wants rather than gradually increasing the amount that they should take. This almost always leads to continued vomiting. Remember, it is not always what they take, but sometimes how much they take. Vomiting alone rarely causes dehydration unless you give drugs by mouth, milk or too much clear fluid at a time. So again, be patient and work at having the child take the essential fluids they need until the virus passes away.

That is all on vomiting. We will talk with you again next time.



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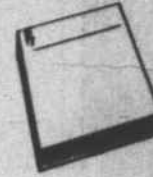


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