

Vomiting in children and babies

Introduction

It's normal for babies and children to vomit occasionally. In most cases, it will last no longer than one to two days and isn't a sign of anything serious.

The most common cause of vomiting in children and babies is gastroenteritis ([/illnesses-and-conditions/stomach-liver-and-gastrointestinal-tract/gastroenteritis/](#)). This is an infection of the gut usually caused by a virus or bacteria, which also causes diarrhoea ([/illnesses-and-conditions/stomach-liver-and-gastrointestinal-tract/diarrhoea/](#)). The symptoms can be unpleasant but your child will usually start to feel better after a few days.

However, persistent vomiting can sometimes cause your child to become severely dehydrated ([/illnesses-and-conditions/nutritional/dehydration/](#)) and occasionally it can be a sign of something more serious, such as meningitis ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/meningitis/](#)).

This page outlines what to do if your child keeps vomiting and describes some of the common causes of vomiting in children and babies.

If your child has a high temperature, you can also read a separate page about fever in children ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/fever-in-children/](#)).

What to do

If your child vomits, you should keep a close eye on them. Trust your instincts and contact your GP immediately if you're worried.

If the cause is just a tummy bug, your child should still be feeling well enough to eat, play and be their usual self. In this case, keep feeding them as normal and offer them regular drinks (see below).

But if they don't seem themselves – for example, if they're floppy, irritable or less responsive – they may be seriously ill, so you should get medical help immediately.

When to get medical advice

You should contact your GP if:

your child is repeatedly vomiting and is unable to hold down fluids

you think they're dehydrated – symptoms of dehydration ([/illnesses-and-conditions/nutritional/dehydration#symptoms](#)) can include a dry mouth, crying without producing tears, urinating less or not wetting many nappies, and drowsiness

their vomit is green or contains blood

they have been vomiting for more than a day or two

Go to your nearest accident and emergency (A&E) department ([/scotlands-service-directory/aes-and-minor-injuries-units/](#)) if your child is vomiting and develops sudden and severe tummy pain (#) , or they're floppy, irritable or less responsive

Call 999 for an ambulance or go to your nearest A&E department immediately if they're vomiting and have a headache ([/illnesses-and-conditions/brain-nerves-and-spinal-cord/headaches/](#)) , stiff neck and a rash.

Looking after your child at home

In most cases, you can treat your child safely at home. The most important thing you can do is make sure they keep drinking fluids to prevent dehydration.

If your baby is vomiting, carry on breastfeeding or giving them milk feeds. If they seem dehydrated, they will need extra fluids. Ask your GP or pharmacist whether you should give your baby oral rehydration solution.

Oral rehydration solution is a special powder that you make into a drink. It contains sugar and salts to help replace the water and salts lost through vomiting and diarrhoea.

Children who are vomiting should keep taking small sips of clear fluid, such as water or clear broth. Fruit juice and fizzy drinks should be avoided until they're feeling better. If they're not dehydrated and haven't lost their appetite, it's fine for your child to eat solid foods as normal.

Again, speak to your GP or pharmacist if you're concerned about dehydration. They may recommend an oral rehydration solution for your child. Contact your GP or practice nurse if your child is unable to hold down oral rehydration solution.

If your child has diarrhoea and is vomiting, they shouldn't go to school or any other childcare facility until 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting.

Read more about treating gastroenteritis in children ([/illnesses-and-conditions/stomach-liver-and-gastrointestinal-tract/gastroenteritis#child-treatment](#)) .

Causes of vomiting in children

There are a number of possible causes of vomiting in children, which are described below.

Gastroenteritis

Gastroenteritis ([/illnesses-and-conditions/stomach-liver-and-gastrointestinal-tract/gastroenteritis/](#)) is an infection of the gut. It's a common cause of vomiting in children and usually lasts a few days.

Food allergy

Food allergies ([/illnesses-and-conditions/nutritional/food-allergy/](#)) can cause vomiting in children, as well as other symptoms, such as a raised, red, itchy skin rash (urticaria ([/illnesses-and-conditions/skin-hair-and-nails/urticaria-hives/](#))) and swelling of the face, around the eyes, lips, tongue or the roof of the mouth.

Watch out for foods that may bring on vomiting and see your GP for a diagnosis if you think your child may have a food allergy.

Other infections

Vomiting can sometimes be a sign of an infection other than gastroenteritis, such as urinary tract infections (UTIs) ([/illnesses-and-conditions/kidneys-bladder-and-prostate/urinary-tract-infection-uti-in-children/](#)), middle ear infections ([/illnesses-and-conditions/ears-nose-and-throat/middle-ear-infection-otitis-media/](#)), pneumonia ([/illnesses-and-conditions/lungs-and-airways/pneumonia/](#)) or meningitis ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/meningitis/](#)).

Contact your child's GP if they're vomiting and experiencing additional symptoms of an infection, such as a high temperature (fever) and irritability.

Appendicitis

Appendicitis ([/illnesses-and-conditions/stomach-liver-and-gastrointestinal-tract/appendicitis/](#)) is a painful swelling of the appendix, a finger-like pouch connected to the large intestine. It causes severe tummy pain that gets worse over time.

If your child has tummy pain that's gradually getting worse, contact your GP, or if they aren't open call NHS 24's 111 service immediately. You should call 999 for an ambulance if they have pain that gets worse quickly and spreads across their tummy.

In most cases of appendicitis, the appendix will need to be surgically removed as soon as possible.

Poison

Accidentally swallowing something poisonous can cause your child to vomit. If you think this is the case, contact your GP immediately or take your child to your nearest accident and emergency (A&E) department ([/scotlands-service-directory/aes-and-minor-injuries-units/](#)) .

Causes of vomiting in babies

These include:

[gastroenteritis \(/illnesses-and-conditions/stomach-liver-and-gastrointestinal-tract/gastroenteritis/\)](#)

a [food allergy \(/illnesses-and-conditions/nutritional/food-allergy/\)](#) or [milk intolerance \(/illnesses-and-conditions/nutritional/lactose-intolerance/\)](#)

[gastro-oesophageal reflux](#) – where stomach contents escape back up the gullet
too big a hole in the bottle teat, which causes your baby to swallow too much milk –
[read more bottle feeding advice \(/healthy-living/pregnancy-and-baby/your-newborn/bottle-feeding/\)](#)

[accidentally swallowing something poisonous](#)

[congenital pyloric stenosis](#) – a condition present at birth where the passage from the stomach to the bowel has narrowed, so food is unable to pass through easily; this causes projectile vomiting

[a strangulated hernia](#) – your baby will vomit frequently and cry as if they are in a lot of pain; this should be treated as a medical emergency

[intussusception](#) (where the bowel telescopes in on itself) – as well as vomiting, your baby may look pale, floppy and have symptoms of dehydration ([/illnesses-and-conditions/nutritional/dehydration#symptoms](#))



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