

UAB Health Education

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

GASTROENTERITIS (“STOMACH FLU”)



Gastroenteritis is caused by a virus infecting the lining of the stomach and intestines, which causes watery diarrhea or loose stools, stomach cramps, nausea, and vomiting. It is usually caused by rotavirus or norovirus and is not actually related to influenza. It is spread by contact with an infected person or through contaminated food or water. Symptoms usually last 1-3 days (but can last up to a week) and resolve on their own.

DIAGNOSIS

Based on symptoms and physical exam. Lab tests are rarely required unless there are signs of significant dehydration, a history of travel, or symptoms are not improving over time.

TREATMENT

Because gastroenteritis is caused by viruses, antibiotics are not used. If you have a fever, headache or muscle aches, you can use acetaminophen (Tylenol). Avoid ibuprofen or aspirin on an empty stomach. Try the following to advance diet:

- If vomiting, rest your stomach by not eating until 24 hours without vomiting.
- It is important to stay hydrated by trying to suck on a popsicle or ice chips.
- If possible, take frequent sips of clear liquids. Drinking too much at once may cause vomiting.
- Once you can tolerate regular amounts of fluid, slowly advance to small amounts of bland foods, then move on to a regular diet as tolerated.
- Avoid the following foods until you are feeling better: spicy food, fried food, alcohol, caffeine, raw or dried vegetables or fruits (except bananas), milk, cheese, yogurt, ice cream, nuts, seeds and popcorn.
- To advance diet, progress through the following steps. When food from one step is tolerated, move on to the next. Most people are back to a normal diet in 2-3 days.
 - Step 1: clear soups, oral rehydration solutions (Pedialyte), decaffeinated flat soda, diluted apple or cranberry juice, Gatorade/Powerade, water/ice chips/popsicles, plain saltines, decaffeinated tea, rice water
 - Step 2: applesauce, bananas, mashed potatoes, rice/plain pasta, cereals without milk, toast with jelly
 - Step 3: broiled or boiled lean meat (white poultry or fish), poached or boiled eggs, well-cooked vegetables and fruits without seeds or skins, sherbet

CALL STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES IF:

- High fever >101°F
- Blood in stool
- You feel lightheaded or dizzy when standing or if you have fainted
- Feeling confused
- Decreased urination
- Diarrhea over 10 stools per day or persistent after 3 days
- Vomiting that does not stop even when not eating or drinking
- Severe or localized abdominal pain

RESOURCES

FamilyDoctor.org <https://familydoctor.org/condition/stomach-virus-gastroenteritis/>

Mayo Clinic <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/viral-gastroenteritis/symptoms-causes/syc-20378847>

SYMPTOMS

- Stomach pain
- Nausea, vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Fatigue, headache, sore muscles

RISK FACTORS

- Likely to spread in areas with a lot of people such as dorms, schools, airplanes, cruise ships, day cares, nursing homes and hospitals
- Weakened immune system, young children and older adults

PREVENTION

- Eat healthy foods, exercise, get adequate sleep
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Wash hands frequently with soap, avoid touching eyes/mouth, cough/sneeze into your elbow
- Clean common surfaces such as counters and doorknobs with antibacterial disinfectant
- Take precautions when traveling in other countries. Drink only well-sealed bottled water, avoid raw foods such as fruits and raw vegetables, avoid undercooked meat and fish



STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Clinic: 205-934-3580

After Hours: 205-934-3411

<https://www.uab.edu/students/health/>

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