

# Diarrhoea and Vomiting

**This help sheet answers some frequently asked questions about diarrhoea and vomiting.**

## What causes diarrhoea and vomiting?

Diarrhoea and vomiting may be caused by gastroenteritis, which is an infection caused by a number of different germs. The most common cause is viruses; usually norovirus.

## What are the symptoms?

You may experience the following:

- Diarrhoea
- Vomiting
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain
- Fever

## Is it infectious?

All cases of gastroenteritis should be regarded as potentially infectious. It can sometimes be spread directly from person to person, especially where there is a breakdown in personal hygiene, for example, not cleaning hands after using the toilet.

It can be spread if someone who is ill prepares food for others. People who work with food present a particularly high risk of spreading the illness and should be excluded from work or school until they are well and have formed bowel movements.

The germs responsible for gastroenteritis may be present in the bowel without causing symptoms. These may be in bowel movements for long periods, even after recovery from illness. However, transmission

is very unlikely if good personal hygiene is practised, such as handwashing.

## What is the incubation period?

The incubation period is the time that you were first exposed to the germ to the time that you started having symptoms. This varies from a few hours to a few days, depending on the germ involved and how much infected food was eaten, if food is implicated as a source.

Normal incubation periods:

Campylobacter	Up to 10 days
Giardia	7-10 days
Salmonella	6-72 hours
Shigellosis	1-7 days
Norovirus	12-48 hours

## What is the treatment?

Most people will get better with no treatment. For some infections, antibiotics may even increase the length of the illness.

You should drink plenty of clear fluids to replace any fluid lost. Water or tea (without milk) is good.

You may drink non-fizzy fruit drinks (however, these are not recommended for children, as it may worsen the problem of dehydration).

## Precautions

- Attention to personal hygiene is very important. Wash your hands with soap and water, rinse and dry them after going

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