

## DESCRIPTION

Gastroenteritis is a general term meaning inflammation or infection of the stomach and intestines.

## FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Diarrhea is the main symptom, and, sometimes, the only one. Diarrhea may range from 2 or 3 loose stools to many watery stools.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Stomach cramps, pain, or tenderness.
- Fever or chills.
- Appetite loss.
- Weakness.
- Dehydration.

## CAUSES

- Viral infections are the most common cause. They are spread by contact with an infected person or by touching an object that has germs on it. Contaminated food or water is another source for infection.
- Other causes are bacterial or parasitic infections, food-borne toxins, shellfish and marine animal poisoning, food intolerance, drug-caused diarrhea, and colitis.

## PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wash hands often. to prevent spread of any germs.
- Don't share eating utensils or towels.
- Use safety precautions in storing and cooking foods.
- When traveling in foreign countries, take care to eat food and drink water that is known to be safe.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The prognosis is excellent. Diarrhea and other symptoms usually clear up in 2 to 5 days. Adults may feel somewhat weak and fatigued for about a week. Complications may include serious dehydration that requires special treatment.

## MEDICATIONS

- Medications may be used for symptom relief if needed. If symptoms are severe or prolonged, you may take antinauseant and antidiarrheal drugs such as Pepto-Bismol or Loperamide (Immodium™).
  - Some infections may require specific treatment, such as antibiotics or prescription anti-diarrheal medications.
  - If a medication you take is the cause of the problem, you may be advised to change medications or stop taking the medication.
- Unless your doctor tells you differently, always finish the full course of your antibiotic prescription, even if you start to feel better.
- Antibiotics may interfere with the effectiveness of birth control pills. Use an alternative method of contraception for the remainder of the month after finishing your antibiotic prescription.

## DIET

- Replace lost fluids and electrolytes with products such as Pedialyte or Ricelyte for infants and children, and diluted rehydration fluids (Gatorade) for adults.
- Once the symptoms improve, try a diet of complex carbohydrates (rice, wheat, potatoes, bread, cereal, and lean meat, such as chicken). A BRAT diet may be recommended.
- Avoid caffeine or dairy products, high-sugar foods and fatty foods until stools have formed for 48 hours.

## SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF

- Symptoms of gastroenteritis last longer than 2 days.
- Symptoms continue or worsen after treatment.
- Blood or mucus appears in the stool or vomit.
- Dark stools with a tar-like consistency.
- You develop a fever.
- Increasing abdominal pain especially if it becomes localized to one area.