

Gastroenteritis

What is gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis (also known as abdominal influenza) is a frequent illness. It can occur at any time of year. It is usually caused by a viral infection in the intestines. Antibiotics as utilised with real influenza are useless because they do not have an effect on viruses.

How does gastroenteritis proceed?

Vomiting and diarrhoea occur. But fever, common cold and coughing also appear. Some children can have severe abdominal pains (abdominal colics). The viruses multiply in the intestines and are excreted with the stool. The illness is only overcome once the immune defence against these viruses has been sufficiently built up. This normally takes a few days, but can also last up to one week or also longer.

How does one treat gastroenteritis?

The most important thing is that your child drinks enough so that dehydration does not come about. Infants are particularly endangered.

- Frequently offer your child small amounts to drink, possibly only in sips or by the spoonful every 5-10 minutes. Continue doing this, even if your child vomits. Write down how much your child drinks.
- If your child is still being breast-fed, simply continue doing this somewhat more frequently. You may additionally also drink electrolyte solutions.
- Electrolyte solutions such as Normolytoral® and Oralpädon® are ideal because they contain body salts and sugar. They can be purchased without prescription in any pharmacy or drugstore.
- If your child refuses electrolyte solutions, you can also mix this with their

(Continuation: treatment of gastroenteritis)

favourite beverage. You can also provide fruit juices or sweetened beverages diluted with water (1 glass with 4 glasses of water). Milk beverages are not ideal, but are allowed if they are the only fluid which your child drinks. They should also be diluted 1:1 with water.

- Your child does not have to eat, but may try everything it desires. Pretzel sticks, zwieback and rice are ideal.
- An anticonvulsant medication such as Buscopan® or a medication against nausea such as Itinerol B6® can be tried in the event of severe abdominal cramps or vomiting. But unfortunately they frequently do not have an effect with children. Anti-diarrhoeal medication such as Imodium® may not be given to children. They extend the duration of diarrhoea and can lead to intestinal obstruction.

When should I seek medical help?

- In the event of absolute refusal to drink or if your child is too tired to drink
- With signs of dehydration: no more tears, less than 4 wet nappies (diapers) per day (may be less wet than usual), apathy (no longer wants to play)
- With unusual symptoms such as exclusively vomiting during more than 2 days, green or bloody vomit or bloody stool
- With gastroenteritis which persists longer than a few days without improvement, especially among infants
- With children less than 3 months as soon as they get fever or the vomiting and/or diarrhoea last longer than a few hours
- At any time, if you have the feeling that your child's condition is deteriorating

