



# Recuperating from Stomach Illness

## Dietary Recommendations



AMERICAN  
COLLEGE  
HEALTH  
ASSOCIATION



**When you are ill with a short-term gastro-intestinal (stomach or bowel) illness, it may help to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration and change what you would normally eat to lessen stomach upset.**

### Nausea and/or Vomiting

#### For the first several hours after becoming ill:

- Give your stomach a rest for a few hours after vomiting or feeling nauseous.
- Drinking large amounts of fluid or eating food too soon may stimulate further vomiting, which is uncomfortable.
- Suck on hard candy or ice chips or take small sips of water to keep your mouth wet.

#### Once your vomiting/nausea has lessened:

- Gradually start drinking clear liquids, like water, non-citrus juice, broth, and sports drinks. Take a sip every 5–10 minutes to start.
- As your stomach tolerates it, slowly increase the amount and decrease the time between sips.
- If nausea or vomiting recurs, go back to smaller amounts or begin the process again, waiting for an hour or two before eating or drinking.

#### Once you can tolerate liquids consistently for several hours:

Stick to bland, easy-to-digest foods like:

- oatmeal
- bananas
- clear, broth-based soups (without many vegetables or meat at first)
- plain rice or pasta
- saltines or toast
- yogurt

Once you can tolerate eating some of these foods, begin a more “regular” diet (what you would normally eat). You may still want to avoid spicy or acidic foods, large amounts of food, alcohol, and caffeinated beverages.

### General Tips

- There is very little evidence that avoiding any particular food will make vomiting or diarrhea better. It is ok to drink and eat milk products when sick with vomiting and/or diarrhea if they don't cause your symptoms to worsen.
- Use an analgesic such as acetaminophen that does not contain aspirin or ibuprofen for fever or aches. Aspirin and ibuprofen can worsen an already upset stomach.
- Do not hesitate to call or return to your health care provider if necessary.
- If you take part in a campus meal plan or you aren't sure where to obtain the food you need, contact the campus dining services.
- Get plenty of rest.

### Diarrhea

When you have diarrhea, you need to drink lots of clear fluids to avoid dehydration. With diarrhea, there is no need to discontinue regular foods by mouth. Avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages when you are ill, as they may cause you to lose additional fluids.

### Dental Work

It is important to stay hydrated and nourished after dental work. If you need to alter your diet as the result of dental work and you aren't feeling nauseated, drink or eat things that don't cause pain or irritation to your mouth. Food with rough textures may be added later when your mouth is less painful. If nausea is a problem, begin with clear liquids like water, non-citrus juice, broth, and sports drinks.

## Dehydration

Dehydration is a medical term for loss of water and important electrolytes (minerals such as potassium and sodium that are in your blood and other bodily fluids). Your body loses these when you experience bouts of vomiting and diarrhea.

Things you might feel when dehydrated:

- dry lips and mouth
- weakness or lethargy
- dizziness, particularly when you stand

Things a health care provider might find:

- fast heart rate
- low urine output (the urine will be dark yellow)
- dry mouth

Babies and small children are more susceptible to severe dehydration. As an adult, you don't need to seek medical attention immediately for dehydration. Using the recommendations in this brochure, you can manage your loss of water and electrolytes at home, helping you to avoid a trip to the emergency room. Most fluids, like juice or water, do not replace electrolytes, so oral rehydration fluids (available over the counter) can be helpful for mild dehydration.

If you have concerns about possible dehydration, contact your health care provider or student health service. If you have other serious medical conditions, such as diabetes, you should contact your health care provider early on in your illness.

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