

Managing a Gastro Infection

Gastro is one of winter's unwelcome guests. What should you do if you're unlucky enough to get it?

What is Gastro?

- Gastro, or gastroenteritis, is an inflammation or an infection of the digestive system.
- It can be caused by a number of things but stomach flu is caused by viruses such as norovirus
- Gastro viruses enter the body through the mouth. You get it through contact with a person who already has gastro or touching surfaces which they have touched and then touching your mouth.
- The symptoms include diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps and flu symptoms such as fever and aches and pains.

What Do You Do if You Catch Gastro?

- Rest and stay warm – do not go to work or school until at least 24 hours after all the symptoms are totally gone. Stay away from public places such as shops or community events.
- Drink plenty of fluids – the aim is to prevent dehydration so sip a little water often or suck an ice cube. If you're vomiting or have a lot of diarrhoea, you may want to have a rehydration gel or powder. A little ginger in warm water may ease nausea and mint tea may refresh your mouth.
- If your symptoms aren't too bad, eat small, light, easy to digest food meals such as soup, crackers, toast, banana or, rice. Avoid caffeine, alcohol, dairy, fatty or spicy food.
- A hot water bottle on your stomach may help to ease the stomach cramps.
- Do not prepare food for other people as you may infect them too.
- Wash and dry your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet, vomiting, coughing or sneezing. Wash your hands in warm water with soap for at least 15 seconds and dry thoroughly.
- Keep a packet of antiseptic wipes on hand and use them to wipe off the toilet button and door handles after use – it is easy to transfer the virus to these surfaces which may then infect others.
- If you are sneezing or coughing, use a tissue to cover your mouth and nose and dispose of it immediately.
- Don't leave soiled clothes or bedding around. Place them in a bucket of water with one cup of bleach – this will kill the virus
- Don't exercise – you may become more dehydrated if you can't replace the fluids you sweat out plus you may infect others.

How Long Will You Be Sick?

- Usually you will start to feel better after about three days but the diarrhoea may continue for 10 days. You will be infectious for several days after all the symptoms have disappeared.
- Some people have lingering symptoms of fatigue, nausea and stomach cramps. Acupuncture can assist with this.

Is Gastro Life Threatening?

- Yes – Dehydration caused by vomiting and/or diarrhoea can be life threatening especially for babies, young children and elderly people.

When Should You See a Doctor?

- If you have severe vomiting and/or diarrhoea you will be losing a lot of fluids – see a doctor as you may need IV fluids. If you develop signs of severe dehydration – extreme thirst, sunken eyes, difficulty standing, blurred vision, lack of alertness - call an ambulance immediately.
- If you start to experience dizziness, high fevers, difficulty breathing, change in heart beat or any kind of rash call an ambulance immediately.