

WHY...?

How long...?

How...?

WHAT...?

HELP!

# Acute Gastroenteritis (Diarrhoea)

Tomar Antibióticos



No es un juego



Región de Murcia  
Consejería de Salud



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# What is Gastroenteritis?

It is a diarrhoeal disease with a sudden starting; it can be accompanied by other symptoms, such as sickness, vomits, fever and abdominal pain. It heals spontaneously in a few days, so it is considered acute gastroenteritis. Its duration can vary, although in younger children it can last up to 1 or 2 weeks.

**It is an infection caused mainly by viruses, and more rarely by bacteria.** Most of the times, it is a minor disease, although in some cases it can lead to hospital admission and loss of school days. **Its potential severity is due to risk of dehydration, which increases if the child is too young.**

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Gastroenteritis is diagnosed by confirming its typical symptoms, without needing complementary diagnostic tests.

Sometimes, doctors request stool sample in order to do a stool test, so after a few days they can know what was the germ causing the diarrhoea. This test is requested when diarrhoea lasts longer than usual or there are some doubts about the diagnosis.

## How is it diagnosed?

**The priority is to avoid the child's dehydration, recovering fluids and mineral salts that are lost, and to encourage early feeding.**

### • Hydration:

Hydration is the most important. In order to avoid dehydration, it is important to give them plenty of fluids, especially those created to replace this loss (oral rehydration solutions), whose composition can replace the water and mineral salts needed. These solutions are available in different formats (sachets, liquids, gelatine and flash).

## How is it treated?

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>>> Your paediatrician will tell you the best way of administration, amount of medicine and frequency.

If you breastfeed your child, continue with it and feed him/her more often than usual.

**Avoid giving them soda, juice or sports drinks, as their salt composition is not the most appropriate.**

• **Dietetic measures:**

If the child is hungry and does not vomit, he/she can follow a normal diet, avoiding at first sugary or fatty drinks and foods (soda, apple juice, pastries, etc.).

- > Regarding babies, it is not necessary to make changes in the diet.
- > Breastfed babies should keep breastfeeding, and you can give them rehydration solutions.
- > If they take formula milk, it is not necessary to dilute it with more water.
- > If babies eat porridge or purée, it is not necessary to change anything, as they can eat any cereal, vegetables, meat, fish, dairies (including milk) and fruits, but you should avoid adding sugar.
- > Unless your paediatrician has prescribed otherwise, it is not necessary to use special compositions because, despite diarrhoea, the intestine absorbs most of the nutrients.





**Early feeding helps curing gastroenteritis**, although it may seem to be the opposite as it causes defecation as soon as the child eats. This is not something to worry about, as it is just the result of an intestinal reflex because it is more active in this situation. Anyhow, and just like in other circumstances, you should not force children to eat if they do not want to.

- **Pharmacological treatment:**

You must avoid the use of medicines without medical prescription.

Antiemetic medicines (those that prevent vomits and sickness) have very limited effectiveness and should only be used with medical prescription, as they can produce side effects.

Probiotics are used on a regular basis; they contain microorganisms that help recovering intestinal flora, and can shorten the duration of diarrhoea.

**You must not give antibiotics to your child if they were not prescribed by your doctor, because they can extend the duration of diarrhoea, as well as the infection transmission period.**



## When can my child go to nursery/school again?

Since most of the cases of gastroenteritis in our country are of minor level, children's activities should not be limited. **If a child's general state is not good (with vomits, fever, abdominal pain or frequent stools), it is recommended that he/she does not go to school until he/she is better.**

In nurseries, it is normal to recommend that children go back to school when they can control stools. If children use nappies, they could go back to school if stools have enough consistency to stay inside them. If stools have blood or mucus, it is recommended to wait until they are normal.

## When should I see my paediatrician?

**If you think your child is dehydrated, you must go to a Health Centre. It is important to identify the most relevant signs of dehydration, which are:**

- When children are extremely thirsty.
- In the case of sunken and dry eyes, as well as dry mouth and chapped lips.
- When there is a small quantity of urine or it is darker than usual.
- In the case of fever.

Generally, an **adequate hydration has the following signs:**

- Children are happy or they play as usual.
- Presence of tears when they cry.
- Drooling.
- They urinate as usual.

>>>



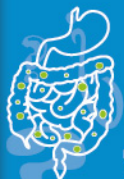
>>> **Breastfed babies are more vulnerable to dehydration**, so you should go to the Health Centre if they are decline or lacking appetite, in the case of frequent stools and, above all, if they vomit often, because we could not replace losses and it could be necessary that medical staff monitor rehydration or they evaluate if intravenous rehydration is needed.

Regarding older children, it is easier to prevent dehydration, as they ask for water if they are thirsty. This can be obvious, but it greatly facilitates treatment. Thus, just in the case of persistent vomiting or strong lack of energy, professional care will be needed.

As it is an infectious disease, gastroenteritis can be spread from one person to another. **The most frequent way of infection is direct contact with children's stools or nappies**, so the best way for preventing it is to increase hygiene measures, such as washing hands (both children and their caregivers), above all after changing a nappy, cleaning them, using the toilet, and before eating.

It can be also spread after drinking or eating contaminated water or food. Thus, food must be kept well refrigerated, fruits and vegetables should be washed before eating them, you must not eat raw fish, seafood or meat, and, if the child uses a baby's bottle, wash it before and after using it.

**How can I prevent gastroenteritis and diarrhoea?**





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Fundación para la Formación  
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