

I'm vomiting and can't keep anything down — Help! ^[1]

Alice,

I have a virus and can't keep anything down. What can I take to help?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It depends on what is causing your inability to keep anything down. While a common cause is a gastrointestinal virus, without a diagnosis from a health care provider, it is possible that your constant upheaval could be caused by multiple things: food poisoning, a migraine, motion sickness, recent exposure to general anesthesia, rotavirus, and alcohol use, to name a few. Given that the visible symptoms of these ailments are similar, a health care provider may be able to provide a more conclusive diagnosis and prepare cultures to determine the cause of your volatile vomiting. In the meantime, there are various ways to facilitate the healing process. It is recommended to:

- Get a lot of rest and take it easy.
- Stay hydrated; take small sips of cold, clear, carbonated or sour drinks, such as ginger ale, lemonade, water, or mint tea.
- Gradually begin to eat easy-to-digest foods such as soda crackers, toast, gelatin, bananas, rice, and chicken.
- Avoid dairy products, caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and fatty or highly seasoned foods.
- Be cautious with medications, which can make your stomach more upset.

While most people recover uneventfully from a bout of vomiting and/or diarrhea, some become seriously dehydrated, or lose too much fluid. It's essential to avoid dehydration. In the most severe cases, a person may become confused, unconscious, and/or experience seizures. Continue to sip or drink liquids and not worry about eating until you are clearly on the mend. It is recommended to drink oral rehydration solutions that provide the vital sugars and salts that the body needs to recover. Avoid sports drinks because they have a high concentration of sugar, which can actually cause or aggravate diarrhea. Symptoms of dehydration include:

- Dry, sticky feeling in the mouth

- Dry eyes or few tears when crying
- Peeing only tiny amounts of dark yellow urine
- Sunken eyes
- Fatigue, extreme weakness, and dizziness
- Thirst
- Dry skin
- Headaches

If you are dehydrated, start by sipping just a spoonful or two of replacement fluid every 15 minutes. When you can hold this down, you can push the time to every ten minutes, and then every five minutes. Then very gradually increase the quantity. If you do not have an oral rehydration solution on hand, your health care provider may be able to provide a recipe for a reasonable, safe substitute. A common recipe is ½ tsp salt, two tbsp sugar, and five cups of water.

If you were, in fact, bit by the stomach bug, it is wise to speak with your healthcare provider. Most "stomach bugs," or gastroenteritis, run their course within 24 to 36 hours, but not until they've caused plenty of discomfort, pain, and even misery. You may have a bacterial infection that will require antibiotics, or some other complication that will require medical treatment. Speak with a health care provider if you:

- Can't hold anything down for more than 24 hours
- Continue to vomit for more than two days
- Have a fever higher than 101.5 F (38.6 C)
- Have severe abdominal pain or cramping
- Feel faint or woozy
- Notice blood in his or her stool or vomit
- Show signs or symptoms of dehydration — excessive thirst, dry mouth, little or no urination, severe weakness, dizziness or lightheadedness

While your queasiness may have you feeling down, following these tips may help your body get back into the swing of things. Hydrate, rest, and recharge. Feel better soon!

Alice!

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