
Children and vomiting

Summary

- Mild vomiting is normal in most babies and improves over time.
 - Most babies need only simple treatment, or none at all.
 - Changing feeding and sleeping positions may help.
 - Medicine should not be given unless prescribed by your doctor.
 - Give a child who is unsettled after vomiting a drink or a little food.
 - If your child seems unwell or shows any worrying symptoms, see a doctor.
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Vomiting can be part of many illnesses in children and babies. It is not usually a major concern as long as your child seems well in other ways.

Vomiting is common for babies and young children. Vomiting occurs when food is brought back up from the stomach. The amount of vomit can often seem larger than it actually is.

Types of vomiting

There are different types of vomiting, including:

- **Possetting** – this is when your baby vomits up small amounts after a feed.
- **Reflux** – this vomiting is common in babies. It is caused when the valve at the top of the stomach accidentally opens. The contents of the stomach come back up the food pipe (oesophagus) slowly. Reflux does not harm babies. They usually grow out of it by the time they are walking.
- **Projectile vomiting** – this is when your baby brings up the stomach contents in a forceful way. The amount of milk or food can seem large on the floor, but is usually only the amount of the last feed. Babies may projectile vomit occasionally, but if it happens after every feed, see your doctor right away as it may be due to a blockage caused by thickening of the muscle at the outlet of the stomach.

Causes of vomiting

Vomiting is usually caused by:

- minor infections like 'gastro' or the common cold
- gastro-oesophageal reflux
- motion sickness from travelling in a moving vehicle.

Sometimes, vomiting may be part of a more serious illness. Children may vomit if they have an infection, such as a urinary tract infection or meningitis, a bowel obstruction or appendicitis. If vomiting progresses to fever and diarrhoea, it will usually be caused by a virus infection. If this persists for 12 hours or more, dehydration is likely. so see your doctor or local hospital emergency department without delay.

Treatment for vomiting

Most babies and children vomit easily and recover quickly. After vomiting, your child may be hungry and thirsty. Give plenty to drink so your child does not become dehydrated. If your child keeps on vomiting and looks unwell, see your doctor. Do not use medication to try and stop the vomiting.

Reflux vomiting can be prevented or reduced

Different positions for feeding or in bed can help reduce your baby's chance of vomiting. You can try to:

- Feed your baby in an upright position.
- Prop your baby up after feeds.
- Lay your baby on the left side.
- Avoid bouncing your baby after feeding.

To help with mild reflux, you can thicken your baby's food with cornflour or infant food thickener. If your child is uncomfortable after vomiting or will not settle, try giving milk or water. This will wash any acid back into the stomach. Some babies get heartburn, which is a burning sensation in the chest. They may be unsettled after feeding or when lying flat. Your doctor can suggest an antacid to relieve heartburn.

When to see your doctor

Take your baby to the doctor if any of these symptoms occur:

- poor weight gain because of the loss of feeds in vomiting
- coughing or choking spells
- blood or yellow-green bile in the vomit
- heartburn
- vomiting increases or becomes forceful after every feed
- your baby seems unwell.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Your local maternal and child health nurse
- The 24 hour Maternal and Child Health Telephone Service. Tel.13 22 29
- Your local hospital emergency or casualty department

Things to remember

- Mild vomiting is normal in most babies and improves over time.
- Most babies need only simple treatment, or none at all.
- Changing feeding and sleeping positions may help.
- Medicine should not be given unless prescribed by your doctor.
- Give a child who is unsettled after vomiting a drink or a little food.
- If your child seems unwell or shows any worrying symptoms, see a doctor.

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