

The aim of the Poplar Grove Practice is to provide a high standard of holistic primary care to our entitled patients by working together as a cohesive multi-disciplinary team.

Our commitment to you, our patients, is to provide you with the highest possible standard of medical care with an efficiently run and friendly service. You will be treated as an individual with dignity, courtesy and respect at all times, irrespective of your ethnic origin, religious belief, sex or sexuality, personal attributes or the nature of your health problems. We expect to be treated in the same way.



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**POPLAR GROVE**  
P R A C T I C E

## Patient Information Leaflet

### Gastroenteritis in Children (Diarrhoea & Vomiting)

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# Gastroenteritis in Children (Diarrhoea & Vomiting)

## What is gastroenteritis?

Gastroenteritis is an infection of the guts (intestines). Many bacteria, viruses and other microbes (bugs) can cause gastroenteritis. It can range from a mild stomach upset for a day or two with some mild diarrhoea, to severe vomiting and diarrhoea for several days or longer.

## What are the symptoms of gastroenteritis?

- The main symptom is diarrhoea, often with vomiting as well
- Crampy pains in the abdomen (tummy) are common. Pains may ease for a while each time some diarrhoea is passed
- High temperatures (fever) and headaches are common

If vomiting occurs, it typically lasts a day or so. Diarrhoea often lasts for several days or more after the vomiting stops. Loose stools (motions or faeces) can persist for a week or so before a normal pattern returns. Sometimes the symptoms last longer.

## What causes gastroenteritis?

- A virus is a common cause in the UK. Sometimes it is just “one of those bugs going about”. Viruses are easily spread from one person to another by close contact, or when an infected person prepares food for others.
- Sometimes it is caused from infected food (food poisoning). There are many types of bacteria that can cause food poisoning. For example, campylobacter and salmonella.
- Water contaminated by bacteria or other “bugs” is a common cause, particularly in countries with poor sanitation.
- Between handling raw meat and food ready to be eaten. (There may be bacteria on raw meat)

**If a child has gastroenteritis, the following are also recommended until symptoms go:**

- Regularly clean the toilets they use. Also, wipe the flush handle and toilet seat with disinfectant (such as household bleach)

- Don't share towels and flannels
- Do not let them help to prepare food for others
- They should stay off school and nursery etc. until symptoms have gone
- Disposable cleaning cloths should be used (or a cloth just for toilet use).
- If a potty has to be used, wear gloves when you handle it, dispose of the contents into a toilet, then wash the potty with hot water and detergent and leave it to dry.

## What is the treatment for gastroenteritis in children?

Symptoms often settle within a week or so as the immune system usually clears the infection. The following are commonly advised until symptoms ease.

- **Give the child lots to drink.** The aim is to avoid dehydration (low body fluid). Even if the child vomits or feels sick, you should still give frequent sips as some fluid will still be absorbed. Ideally, give water as the main drink, but also give some fruit juice as this contains some sugar. However, any drink is better than none. If the child will only drink their favourite drink then that is fine. (Ice lollies are a useful extra source of fluid).
- **Rehydration drinks** may be advised by a doctor or nurse if they are concerned that the child is at risk of dehydration. You can give these instead of, or in addition to, normal drinks. Rehydration drinks are made from sachets which you can buy from pharmacies. You can add the contents of the sachet to water. Rehydration drinks provide a perfect balance of water, salt and sugar. They are better than just drinking water alone. The small amount of sugar and salt helps the water to be absorbed better from the gut into the body. They do not stop or reduce diarrhoea, but are the best drinks to treat dehydration. (**DO NOT** use home-made salt drinks as the quantity of salt has to be exact)
- If clothing or bedding is soiled, first remove any stools (faeces) into the toilet. Then wash in a separate wash at as high a temperature as possible.

- **The child should eat as normally as possible.** Do not “starve” a child with gastroenteritis. This used to be advised but is now known to be wrong. However, if he or she does not want to eat, then that is fine. Drinks are the most important and food can wait until their appetite returns. Offer some food every now and then. Soups and food high in carbohydrates such as bread, pasta, rice and potatoes are best to start with
- **Breast fed babies** should continue to breast feed if they will take it. This is in addition to extra rehydration drinks which may be advised. **Bottle fed babies** should be fed with their normal full strength feeds if they will take it. Again, this is in addition to extra rehydration drinks which may be advised.
- **You should not give medicines to stop diarrhoea** to young children. They sound attractive remedies, but are unsafe to give to children due to possible complications.
- **Give paracetamol or ibuprofen** to ease a high temperature or headache.

If symptoms are severe, or persist, a doctor or nurse may ask for a sample of the diarrhoea. This is sent to the lab to look for infecting bugs (bacteria, parasites etc.). Sometimes an antibiotic or other treatment is needed.

## Are there any complications from gastroenteritis?

Complications are uncommon. Make an appointment in the FAST TRACK clinic if any of the following develop, or if any other symptoms occur that you are concerned about:

- **Dehydration.** Symptoms include passing little urine, dry mouth and tongue, drowsiness
- **Blood** in the diarrhoea
- **Vomiting** for more than one day, or diarrhoea which does not start to settle after 3-4 days
- **Pains** which are getting worse
- **Drowsiness or confusion**
- **Infections** caught abroad