Tummy Troubles

Vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, stomach pain – almost all children have one or another from time to time. Occasional tummy troubles are rarely serious and often can be handled at home with rest and/or changes in diet.

Fever plus vomiting and diarrhea often signal the “stomach bug,” a one- or two-day bout of illness usually caused by a virus. Food poisoning can also cause these symptoms. The biggest threat from these illnesses is dehydration (excessive loss of fluids). The younger the child, the greater the risk.

Dehydration can include one or more of these signs:
- sunken eyes
- in babies, sunken soft spot (fontanel on top of the head)
- dry or sticky mouth
- decreased urination (in babies, less than six wet diapers a day; in older children, urination only once or twice in eight hours)
- increased sleepiness or sluggish inactivity
- increased fussiness or irritability
- no tears when crying

Diet for a Tummy Bug
While your child is still sick, give small, frequent sips of clear fluids (water, non-sweetened juice). For children younger than 2 years, doctors often prefer a special fluid-replacement drink, such as Pedialyte. For older children, try Gatorade, grape juice, water, ice pops or flat ginger ale. Do not give red colored drinks as they can be confused with blood when vomiting.
After the vomiting subsides, offer the “BRAT” diet – bananas, rice, applesauce and toast. Start slowly with small servings. If your child is younger than 12 months, your pediatrician may have special instructions because of the danger of dehydration.

**Call your pediatrician immediately if your child:**
- is less than 6 months old and develops persistent diarrhea and/or vomiting
- is less than 12 months old and shows signs of stomach pain, such as prolonged crying and pulling her legs toward her belly
- has a stomachache for more than three hours, especially if the pain is located in the lower right side of her belly, which could be a sign of appendicitis
- has a stomachache along with swelling in the groin area or testicles
- still has stomach pain three hours after vomiting
- vomits greenish-yellow stomach contents or has blood in her vomit or stool
- shows signs of dehydration (see other side)

**Other Kinds of Tummyaches**
Overeating, indigestion, constipation or stress also can cause a stomachache with no fever, diarrhea or vomiting.

**Constipation** means infrequent or painful bowel movements (less than one every three or four days). Diet changes often relieve constipation. Never give a child over-the-counter laxatives, suppositories or enemas without specific instructions from your pediatrician.

**Stress** can cause stomachaches that tend to recur and may happen prior to worrisome events, such as tests at school. Symptoms usually go away with rest, but you still need to let your pediatrician know about them.

If your child shows signs of dehydration, call your pediatrician immediately.

For more information on health-related topics, visit our health library at CHKD.org/healthlibrary.

Your child’s pediatrician should be your primary source of advice about your child’s health.