

VIRAL GASTROENTERITIS (sometimes referred to as the stomach flu) has been on the rise in recent weeks. Viral gastroenteritis refers to an inflammation of the stomach and intestines caused by a virus. Patients commonly develop nausea and abdominal cramps followed by a loose, watery diarrhea, vomiting, low grade fever, headache and muscle aches.

Viral gastroenteritis affects adults and children year round and, though it can be spread through food and water, it is usually transmitted from one person to another. Hand washing, particularly after a bowel movement, can decrease the spread to others and patients should not share the same cups or eating utensils. The incubation period is between 18 to 72 hours. The illness usually lasts 1 to 3 days. Medical intervention is usually not necessary. The primary goal is to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics can make the diarrhea worse and have no effect against the virus that causes the illness.

If this illness occurs, it is best to rest and follow the GI diet. If you are vomiting, don't take anything by mouth until 2 or 3 hours after the vomiting subsides and then take only sips of clear fluid until you feel certain that the nausea has cleared. You may take Immodium for diarrhea and Tylenol for fever. Once the nausea has subsided, be sure to take a combination of sweet and salty fluids to prevent dehydration. Eating solid foods may make the diarrhea worse but saltine crackers and dry toast are fine.

If you are unable to keep anything down for longer than 12 hours or if you develop persistent faintness or lightheadedness, you may be becoming dehydrated and should seek medical care. Students can be seen at Health Services. Call early for a same day appointment 254-3156. After hours if you are feeling dehydrated and faint call public safety for assessment to determine if you need transport to an emergency room for IV therapy.

There are other non-viral causes of gastroenteritis such as bacterial pathogens and parasites. These are much less common and often cause bloody diarrhea, higher fever, and/or persistent diarrhea (ie. greater than 3-5 days). **Therefore, if your symptoms are not improving in 3-5 days or if there is blood in your stools, you should seek medical care to make sure you don't have one of these more serious but still treatable diseases.**

Gastroenteritis Diet

	<u>NO</u> alcohol or caffeinated beverages <u>NO</u> spicy foods <u>NO</u> raw vegetables, fruits, or bran <u>NO</u> milk or milk products (yogurt, cheese) <u>NO</u> fried foods
Day # 1	Jell-O Clear soups or bouillon like chicken broth Decaffeinated soda, sweetened with sugar (defizzed if possible) Diluted apple juice (NOT orange juice) Electrolyte drink such as Power-aid Water/Ice chips Popsicles Plain saltines
Day #2	Apple sauce Bananas Mashed potatoes Plain pasta, Ramen noodles or rice (without butter, margarine or sauces) Cream of Wheat Toast with jelly (<u>not</u> jam, butter or margarine) Rice
Day #3	Broiled or boiled meat, poultry or fish Poached eggs