

# **GASTROENTERITIS**

## **BASIC INFORMATION:**

### **DESCRIPTION:**

Irritation and infection of the digestive tract that can often cause sudden and sometimes violent upsets. Gastroenteritis may be confused with spastic colitis. It affects all ages, but is most severe in young children (1 to 5 years) and adults over 60.

### **FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS:**

- Nausea that sometimes causes vomiting
- Diarrhea that ranges from 2 to 3 loose stools to many watery stools
- Abdominal cramps, pain or tenderness
- Appetite loss
- Fever
- Weakness

### **CAUSES:**

- A variety of viruses, bacteria or parasites that have contaminated food or water
- Food poisoning
- Use of harsh laxatives
- Change in bacteria that normally live in the intestinal tract
- Chemical toxins in certain plants, seafood, or contaminated food
- Heavy metal poisoning

### **RISK INCREASES WITH:**

- Adults over 60
- Newborns and infants
- Improper Diet
- Excess alcohol consumption
- Use of drugs, such as aspirin, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories, antibiotics, laxatives, cortisone or caffeine
- Travel to foreign countries

### **PREVENTIVE MEASURES:**

- Wash hands frequently if you or someone around you has gastroenteritis
- Avoid as many causes and risks mentioned above as possible
- Take care with food preparation

### **EXPECTED OUTCOME:**

Vomiting and diarrhea usually disappear in 2 to 5 days, but adults may feel weak, fatigued for about one week.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS:

- Serious dehydration that requires intravenous fluids
- Serious illness that may be overlooked because symptoms of gastroenteritis mimic other disorders

### TREATMENT:

#### GENERAL MEASURES:

- Diagnostic tests may include laboratory studies of blood and stool
- Treatment is usually supportive (rest, fluids)
- Mild cases are usually treated at home
- It is not necessary to isolate persons with gastroenteritis
- Hospitalization, if dehydration is severe

#### MEDICATION:

- Medicine is usually not necessary. If gastroenteritis is severe or prolonged, you may be prescribed antinausea and anti diarrhea medication such as Pepto-Bismol. Some antidiarrheal medicines (like Lomotil) may prolong diarrhea and irritation
- Certain bacteria and parasites may require specific diarrhea and irritation

#### ACTIVITY:

Rest in bed until nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and fever are gone.

#### DIET:

- Suck ice chips or drink small amounts of clear fluids frequently
- After diarrhea and vomiting stop, drink small amounts of clear liquids, such as tea, "flat" ginger ale or lemon-lime soda, broth and gelatin
- If you tolerate liquids for 12 hours, eat small amounts of soft foods, such as cooked cereal, rice, eggs, custard, baked potato and yogurt.
- If you tolerate soft food for 2 or 3 days, gradually return to a normal diet. Avoid alcohol, spicy food (pizza, spaghetti, onions), gravy, raw vegetables, raw fruit, salad dressing, cream soup, coffee and milk for several more days.

#### NOTIFY THE OFFICE IF:

- Symptoms of gastroenteritis persist longer than 2 days
- The following occur during treatment:
  - Mucus or blood in stool
  - Fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher
  - Abdominal swelling
  - Severe pain in the abdomen or rectum, especially pain that begins in the center and moves to the lower right side
- Vomiting and diarrhea recur after treatment
- Signs of dehydration, such as a dry mouth, wrinkled skin, excess thirst or decreased urination, develop