

Mayo Clinic Minute: What to do when sick with norovirus or 'stomach flu'

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If you went out for the evening and woke up with a sudden bad stomach, chances are you might be experiencing viral gastroenteritis. That's the broad term for an infection in the intestines. Some call it "stomach flu."

Gastroenteritis can be brought on by norovirus—a highly contagious viral infection most often spread through person-to-person contact or [contaminated food](#) or water, or by touching contaminated surfaces. It can be quite severe for some people, but for most, a few days of feeling unwell is common.

One of the most important things to do is stay hydrated, says Dr. Jay-Sheree Allen, a Mayo Clinic family medicine physician.

Dr. Allen says if you experience [nausea](#) and vomiting, diarrhea and [stomach pain](#)—all symptoms of norovirus—drink lots of fluids and follow a bland diet like crackers, or broth or flavored water. This bland diet is well-tolerated by some people.

For the first couple of days, you may not feel like eating or drinking, and might be highly fatigued.

"Set a timer on your phone if you must to say it's time to try to eat something, or it's time to at the very least to drink something to remain hydrated," says Dr. Allen.

Dehydration can be a serious complication, especially for [older adults](#) and [young children](#).

"If you can't keep water down after 24 hours, it's important to seek help," says Dr. Allen. "If you are able to keep some things down, but your symptoms persist after 48 to 72 hours, it's also a wise idea to seek help from a medical professional."

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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