

# Vomiting in Toddlers

Vomiting is a defensive reaction of the body to some kind of toxicity. This defensive response occurs mainly due to two reasons: one is if the stomach gets irritated due to either ingesting the wrong type of food or from infection, and the second reason is due to the irritation of the vomiting center in the brain.

Most commonly, toddlers vomit due to some problem in the stomach. But because these young ones are sensitive, it is not uncommon for them to vomit due to central reasons (irritation of the vomiting center in the brain). Examples of central causes are motion sickness or generalized intoxication due to infection.

But perhaps the most common cause is the infection of the gastrointestinal tract. Among toddler's viral gastrointestinal infections in general, they may get an upset stomach even if the infection is of the upper respiratory tract. In viral causes, mostly vomiting is self-limiting, and all that is required is to keep a child well hydrated and rested. Bacterial infections are another reason for vomiting, which may sometimes need treatment with antibiotics.

Eating the wrong kind of food can also cause irritation of the gastrointestinal tract. As kids grow, it is common for them to play outside and put dirty fingers in their mouths or eat the wrong kinds of things.

## When Should you worry?

If the vomiting is severe and recurrent along with other severe symptoms, there may be a cause of concern. Vomiting along with severe and acute pain in lower part of the stomach may indicate appendicitis in a small number of cases. A symptom like a severe headache along with stiffness in the neck may point to meningitis. Such causes of vomiting are far less common but are acute conditions that require immediate medical attention.

Even if other symptoms are not evident, if there is continued vomiting that leads to signs of dehydration, medical help should be sought, especially if the child becomes pale or you notice blood in vomit.

Thus, the red flags of vomiting are as follows: a severe and continuous pain in the belly, change in the color of vomit, projectile vomiting, vomiting after an injury (especially after a head injury), vomiting after waking up (along with a headache), and vomiting that lingers on.

## Taking care of the toddler

The first approach of parents should be making the child comfortable and understanding that vomiting occurs in toddlers because they are more sensitive to any intoxication, even mild ones. Secondly, it is vital to understand that vomiting is a defensive reaction, so giving a child medication to stop vomiting is not recommended (in that way, one may either delay the sickness or mask the symptoms resulting in delayed diagnosis).

Keeping the child hydrated is the first line of treatment. It is vital to continue feeding the child with fluids, even if the vomit has been repeated. It is better to use ORS (oral rehydration salts) for this purpose.

Once the vomiting has subsided, start by giving them small portions of food. Yogurt is a great probiotic, to begin with.

*About the author:*

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Dr. Preet is a family physician. He has been practicing medicine for last 15 years and often sees children with various gastrointestinal problems. He understands that vomiting is a worrisome symptom for most parents. He is also a passionate writer.

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