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NAUSEA, VOMITTING & DIARRHEAL ILLNESS

Acute Gastrointestinal (GI) illness is generally caused by either a virus or food poisoning, and results in the three cardinal symptoms of acute GI distress:

- Nausea (feeling sick to the stomach)
- Vomiting (regurgitating food)
- Diarrhea (excess fluid via the rectum)

During the acute phase of these issues it can be difficult to nearly impossible to keep food and liquids down, but is critical that this be attempted and accomplished, or dehydration will develop and the illness will begin a downward spiral, requiring either an Emergency Room visit for IV fluids, or hospitalization for correction of fluid and electrolyte (mineral) imbalances.

The KEYS are:

1. Settling the Stomach...so that liquids can be taken
2. Focusing on Liquids...so that dehydration does not set in
3. Eating light foods... if possible (to provide energy for healing). This is not a requirement for healing from an acute GI illness; so don't feel that the sick person needs to eat food. The only requirement is liquid intake!
4. Do be aware that abdominal cramping, to a mild degree, can be associated with these issues, but if the pain is intense, other medical complications may be occurring (such as partial or complete small bowel obstruction or appendicitis.) So...if you are having very intense pains that are much more severe than you have experienced in the past, or if those pains are persisting for several hours, it is best to be checked in the office or emergency room.

Settling the Stomach (treating nausea):

This is the most difficult issue to treat at home as there is very little one can do to settle the stomach during the acute phase. Coca-Cola with the carbonation eliminated (Flat Coke), Ginger Ale, or Ginger Root....can be tried,

but these are often inadequate, and the key to getting the stomach to settle is getting a good nausea medication.

If the vomiting does not stop after 4 hours, then calling for a prescription medication is often a good idea. Compazine (prochlorperazine), Phenergan (Promethazine)...are the most commonly prescribed medications and they work by quieting the 'nausea center' in the brain. Best given as suppositories (rectally), they will break the vomiting cycle.

Alternatively, these medications can be given as pills but often this is useless as the medications themselves are thrown up and unable to be effective. That said, sometimes the oral form will work, and in addition to the above medications, there are others including Reglan (metoclopramide) and Zofran (ondansetron). These can be quite effective if they are kept down for 15-30 minutes, but if thrown up immediately, then a suppository is necessary.

Liquids:

Preventing dehydration is of utmost importance in this situation, so focusing on the liquids is the key to successful resolution of the acute phase of the GI illness.

Clear liquids (any liquid that light can easily shine through) are the best liquids to use. This includes:

- Plain Water
- Gatorade (or other electrolyte solutions that are similar)...do not use sugar-free versions of these drinks as the calories in these drinks are helpful in treating the illness and may be the only calories the person can absorb for the first hours or days
- Tea
- Cranberry Juice, Apple Juice (watered down...mixed ½ & ½ with water), White Grape Juice
- Broth from Chicken Soup, Matzo Ball Soup, Bullion
- Popsicles

Sipping liquids ..sip, sip, sip...and pushing the fluids progressively with time is the most important treatment provided. Focus on this above all else!

Eating Light Foods:

When the stomach has remained settled enough to consider foods, then trying simple to digest items is worthwhile. That said it is not imperative that a person eat at all during the acute phase of illness. So long as they are taking in good amounts of fluids that have calories in them (sugary drinks are fine

when sick) then there is no need to worry about the timing of starting on solid foods

Light Foods include:

- Toast (plain white bread)
- Crackers
- Plain Noodles
- Macaroni (no cheese)
- Plain Rice
- Bananas
- Apple Sauce

As the acute phase resolves, diarrhea may persist for a few weeks. This is commonplace and not a concern. Increase the diet as you tolerate, back to your 'normal' foods. Over time, the digestive system will 'right' itself, but do not be concerned about ongoing diarrhea if it lasts for 3-4 weeks, but if going on longer that that it is best to come in to review the particulars surrounding your illness and confirm that there are no other issues at play.