Care After Treatment for Gastroenteritis

You have been treated for gastroenteritis. Gastroenteritis is an inflammation (irritation) of the stomach and intestines. Common symptoms are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramping and fever.

Causes of gastroenteritis:

Gastroenteritis may be caused by many things. Common causes include a viral or bacterial infection from contaminated food or water, or too much alcohol. Some medicines also may irritate your stomach.

Instructions for care:

Foods and fluids

It is most important to drink plenty of fluids in small amounts. Fluids should be clear and caffeine-free, containing sugar and electrolytes (such as Gatorade® or other sports drinks).

Restart your diet with clear liquids and add foods slowly after your nausea and vomiting stop. The steps below will help you do this:

Step 1: Clear Liquids

- Drink ½ to 1 cup of liquid every hour. Examples of clear liquids include jell-o, 7-Up®, clear fruit juices, non-caffeinated tea, popsicles and broth. Cloudy liquids such as milk or orange juice are more irritating to your stomach. Avoid alcohol and caffeine. When you can keep clear liquids down without vomiting or having diarrhea, try a bland diet.

Step 2: Bland Diet

- The foods in this diet are less irritating to your stomach. Add foods such as white bread, crackers, oatmeal, rice cereals, fish or chicken, potatoes, rice and most vegetables, except those of the cabbage family. No fried foods or highly spiced foods. When you can comfortably eat a bland diet, try your regular diet.
Step 3: Your Regular Diet

- Add foods from your regular diet that may have more fiber and spices.
- Avoid smoking, alcohol and irritating foods such as coffee and chocolate.

Other care tips:

- Some medicines such as erythromycin, prednisone, ibuprofen, aspirin and many arthritis medicines also may irritate your stomach. Call your doctor if you feel that a medicine is causing your stomach to be irritated.
- It is important to wash your hands after using the toilet.
- Do not participate in food handling or preparation until the illness has gone away.
- Call your doctor if dry mouth, dizziness, weakness, decreased urine output, or mental confusion occurs.
- Take antidiarrheal medicines only if your doctor has prescribed them for you.
- If antibiotics are prescribed for you, finish all the pills, even if your symptoms go away.

Follow-Up:

You should return to the OSU Emergency Department (293-8333) or the OSU East Emergency Department at (614) 257-3414 or call your doctor, if:

- Your stools become black, tarry or you notice blood in them. Call 911 if you get very dizzy when standing.
- You vomit blood. Call 911 if you are vomiting large amounts of blood or you are dizzy when standing.
- You are unable to keep any fluids down for several hours.

If you would like more written information, please call the Library for Health Information at (614)293-3707. You can also make the request by e-mail: health-info@osu.edu.