



**SIZWE**

MEDICAL FUND

Your health in caring hands

**GASTROENTERITIS**

What you need  
to know

**BECAUSE....CARING  
COMES NATURALLY TO US**

## Why should Gastroenteritis be treated?

Dehydration is an important sign of advanced and/or untreated gastroenteritis. Severe dehydration could be fatal. These are some important signs to look out for:

### SIGNS

- + In babies: sunken eyes or sunken fontanelle (that soft spot at the top of a baby's head)
- + Rapid breathing
- + The skin loses its elasticity: if you softly pinch the affected person, the skin is slow to recover.
- + Decreased urine output
- + Rapid weight loss over days and even hours
- + Lack of energy and listlessness
- + The inside of the mouth is dry

## How is Gastroenteritis treated?

The most important aspect is to keep the patient hydrated so as to prevent him losing too much fluid. An oral rehydration solution should be used rather than water. The reason is that plain water is not absorbed as well as water that contains sugar and salt. Dehydration results in a loss of salt, and this needs to be replaced without causing an imbalance to your body's pH levels. Other beneficial therapies are available without a prescription at your pharmacy. These include anti-diarrhoeal treatments and anti-nausea pills. Probiotics have been shown to help the body recover after a bad bout of gastroenteritis.

# What is Gastroenteritis ?

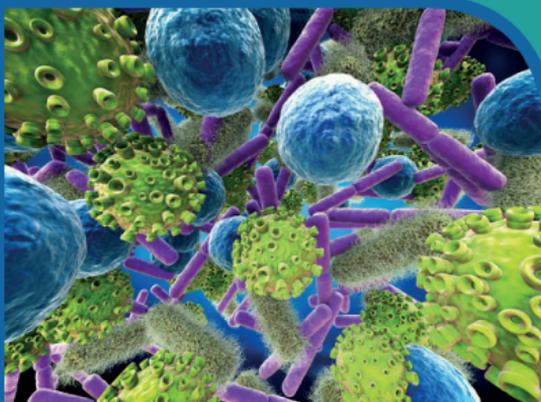
Gastroenteritis is a common, acute condition in which the lining of your intestines (your digestive system) becomes inflamed.

## What causes Gastroenteritis ?

**Viruses:** the most common cause of gastroenteritis. An example is rotavirus which frequently affects children.

**Bacteria:** culprits include Salmonella and E. coli. Bacteria can produce toxins that result in food poisoning.

**Parasites:** Giardia is one of many parasites that may play a role.



## How is Gastroenteritis spread ?

It may be transferred from one person to the next, or through consuming contaminated food or water, or through not washing hands after going to the bathroom or changing a baby's nappy.

## How is Gastroenteritis diagnosed ?

If your symptoms are severe, your medical practitioner may request a stool sample to confirm the cause of the infection, after which suitable medication is prescribed. More often than not, however, the symptoms of gastroenteritis don't last more than a few days.

## What are the other names for Gastroenteritis ?

Gastroenteritis has also been dubbed gastro, gastric flu, diarrhoeal disease and food poisoning.

## What are the symptoms of Gastroenteritis ?

Symptoms may include the following:

- + Diarrhoea (Frequent watery or loose stools)
- + Vomiting
- + Abdominal pain
- + Headache
- + Cramps
- + Fever
- + Nausea
- + Chills

# Are certain people more at risk of developing Gastroenteritis ?

Anyone can develop gastroenteritis; however these groups are more prone to the illness:



**Babies and young children:** their immune systems are still developing.



**The elderly:** they usually have weakened immunity.



**HIV-positive** people and other people with compromised immune systems.



**The poor:** people living in impoverished settings have bad sanitation and a lack of proper food storage facilities. When nutrition is poor, the increase in gastroenteritis is great. This is a primary cause of death in the very young, across Africa.



**Tourists:** people who travel to foreign destinations may come into contact with bacteria that they have no defence against, making them a target for gastroenteritis.

They do this by restoring the balance between the 'good', health-promoting bacteria and the 'bad' disease-causing bacteria in your digestive system. If your gastroenteritis has lasted for more than a few days, make an appointment with your medical practitioner.

## Are there any lifestyle changes I could make, to help or prevent Gastroenteritis ?

- + Wash your hands using soap and water, before cooking, and before feeding children
- + Teach your children to wash their hands before eating, and after going to the toilet
- + If you're worried about water being safe to drink, rather boil it and let it cool
- + Wash, peel or cook vegetables and fruit before eating
- + Refrigerate food after it has been cooked; do not leave it standing around.

The Sizwe Medical Fund Disease Management Programme provides access to chronic medication and ongoing support.

To reap the benefits please register on our Disease Management Programme at



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