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Microbes, such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites, can cause gastrointestinal (GI) infections, sometimes known as stomach bugs. These infections can cause symptoms like fever, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain. Adequate and timely treatment is crucial in reducing symptoms, avoiding problems, and promoting a speedy recovery.

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of typical therapies for gastrointestinal infections. It is important to understand all your options in treatment; however, this article should not replace the advice of a healthcare professional. If you think you have a gastrointestinal infection, you should see your healthcare professional.

Fluid Replacement

Maintaining adequate fluid intake is one of the key goals in the treatment of GI infections. Vomiting and diarrhea both cause significant fluid loss that can turn into dehydration if not replaced. Oral rehydration salt (ORS) solutions are frequently advised as a fast way to replace fluids. To boost fluid and electrolyte levels, ORS contains the perfect combination of water, electrolytes, and carbohydrates. ORS solution can be bought over the counter or made at home. To stay hydrated, drink water, clear broths, or herbal teas.

Antibiotics

Occasionally, antibiotics are used to treat the underlying bacterial causes of gastroenteritis. Salmonella, Campylobacter, and Shigella are examples of typical bacteria that can cause GI infections. Antibiotics help by killing the bacteria, which can provide symptom relief and shorten the length of the disease. Viral infections, which cause a significant number of GI diseases, cannot be treated with antibiotics. For an accurate diagnosis and advice on

using antibiotics, it is essential to speak with a healthcare provider.

Antiviral drugs

Some viruses can cause GI infections. Two examples of these types of viruses are

- norovirus (commonly known as the stomach flu)
- rotavirus (a virus that causes diarrhea)

The majority of viral GI infections are short lived, and treatment focuses on symptom management and hydration maintenance. For some viral conditions, such as rotavirus, vaccines are available and provide protection.

Symptom Management

Symptoms of GI infections can be managed through various measures. Antidiarrheals such as loperamide work by delaying bowel motions, helping manage diarrhea. It is crucial to take these medications as prescribed and with caution, as they might not be appropriate for all illnesses or patients. If prescribed by a healthcare provider, patients may take painkillers like acetaminophen or ibuprofen to lower fevers or ease discomfort. There are several medications available by prescription to treat symptoms of nausea and vomiting. Remember, treating symptoms does not treat the illness itself; instead, treatment should concentrate on addressing the root cause.

Probiotics

Digestive infections can upset the normal balance of bacteria in the stomach, which can lead to additional problems. The role and importance of supplemental probiotics to restore the gut microbiome after GI infections is not clear. If you are interested in using probiotics, it is advised to talk with a healthcare provider.

Treatment of Gastrointestinal infections other than a stomach bug

Some GI infections are more serious and require medical treatment. If your symptoms are long-lasting or if you are concerned, speak with your healthcare provider.

These types of infections include:

- *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) is a spiral shaped bacteria that lives in the mucous lining of the stomach to protect itself from the harsh acid environment. It is estimated that at least one-half of the world's population has it. Most individuals infected with *H. pylori* will not experience any signs or symptoms. However, *H. pylori* can cause a range of digestive issues that can be mild to life-threatening.

H. pylori is one of the most common human infections. It is a common cause of inflammation in the stomach (gastritis), peptic ulcers, gastric cancer, and unexplained upper gastrointestinal symptoms. There are blood, breath, stool, and endoscopic tests to identify this infection. Treatments consist of a 2-4 drug regimen given for up to 14 days. Patients treated for *H. pylori* should undergo a follow up test 4 weeks after the course of treatment to determine if it was successful.

Learn more about *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*)
with IFFGD Fact Sheet No. 166
Helicobacter pylori (*H. pylori*) Infection

- *Clostridioides difficile* or *C. difficile* is a bacterium that can infect the large bowel (or colon) and is a major cause of infectious colitis and diarrhea in healthcare settings around the world. Infectious colitis is redness, swelling, and inflammation of the colon.

C. difficile infection (CDI) affects over 350,000 patients a year. It is the most common hospital-acquired infection in the U.S. It is widely present in the environment and can be found on surfaces like doorknobs, bedside tables, and counters, especially in healthcare facilities. Thorough hand washing with soap and water is important as hand sanitizers cannot kill CDI. There are specific treatments for CDI

which can be taken after a proper diagnosis by a healthcare provider.

Learn more about *C. difficile* infection (CDI)
with IFFGD Fact Sheet No. 167
C. difficile infection (CDI)

Conclusion

Gastrointestinal infections require a diverse approach for effective management. Staying hydrated is key and medications can be used for symptomatic relief. Rehydration is the mainstay of management. If symptoms are severe, contact a health care provider for proper diagnosis and treatment recommendations. Patients can recover from GI infections quickly by adhering to the right treatment plan.

About IFFGD

The International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit education and research organization. We work to promote awareness, scientific advancement, and improved care for people affected by chronic digestive conditions. Our mission is to inform, assist, and support people affected by gastrointestinal disorders. Founded in 1991, we rely on donors to carry out our mission. Visit our website at: www.iffgd.org.

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