

Vomiting Isn't Just Gross!

You may think that vomiting is simply disgusting and gross. You may think it is one of life's most unpleasant, uncomfortable experiences. But did you know that vomiting actually serves an important purpose? Vomiting protects us from harmful poisons, called **toxins**, which can make us very ill. In fact, when someone vomits, it is usually a protective response, or **reflex**. The whole body is working together to push toxins out of our bodies before they cause us more harm.

Why We Vomit!

We vomit for many reasons, but most often we vomit because it is our bodies' way of taking care of us. If we **ingest**, or take into our bodies, a substance that is harmful, our bodies don't want us to absorb too much of the poison from it. The substance can be a food, bacteria, or something to which we are allergic. As a result, we **expel** that substance, or get rid of it through vomiting.

Another time we might vomit is when we feel seasick or experience what is known as motion sickness. When we feel dizzy and seasick, our bodies actually think it is poison that is responsible for making us feel so miserable. And, once

again, our bodies find a way to eliminate that poison from our systems through vomiting.

Vomiting Is a Team Effort!

Our bodies work together in amazing ways to vomit toxins that might cause us to become very sick. You might think that our stomachs decide when we vomit because that is where we usually experience discomfort. However, it is actually our brains that make sure we eliminate the toxin that has entered our



bodies. A part of our brains called the **medulla** controls functions, like breathing and swallowing, that we do without even thinking. The medulla also controls vomiting. When the brain believes the body has ingested a toxic substance, it sends a signal for the muscles around the stomach and the muscle below the lungs, called the **diaphragm**, to start working. These muscles squeeze and contract together to force the contents of our stomachs up and out of our bodies. Have you noticed that it also feels difficult to breathe when we vomit? This is another way our bodies protect us! Our bodies prevent us from breathing in, or inhaling, any of the harmful contents coming up and out of our mouths.

Prevent Vomiting by Staying Healthy!

Except in unusual cases, vomiting is a reflex that occurs in our bodies to keep us safe. Even though we all dread that feeling that signals we might need to vomit, remember that our bodies are performing an important function. Vomiting may be gross, but for the most part, it is harmless and actually keeps us healthy.

Of course, no one wants to vomit, so you can take preventative actions to avoid it. Be sure to wash your hands regularly to prevent harmful germs or bacteria from entering your body. And if food smells like it might have gone bad, don't eat it! If you do eat it, though, your body will make a great effort to protect you!