

DIARRHEA

An occasional loose bowel movement is not cause for alarm. If, however, the bowel pattern *suddenly changes* to loose, watery stools that occur more frequently than usual, your child has diarrhea.

Diarrhea results from irritation to the inner lining of the intestine, causing loss of nutrients, fluids, minerals and salts. These losses can be made worse if your child is fed foods and beverages high in sugar, since unabsorbed sugars draw more water into the intestine, increasing the diarrhea.

When the body loses too much water, dehydration results. This can be prevented by replenishing the diarrhea losses with adequate amounts of fluids and salt, as described below under *Treatment*.

Although diarrhea may be caused by a number of conditions such as: food allergy, oral antibiotics, or infections outside the intestinal tract, most often it's caused by viruses. Irritability, fever, and vomiting often accompany a viral diarrhea illness initially, but as with most viral infections, is self-limited and requires only supportive therapy until your child recovers.

HOME TREATMENT OF DIARRHEA

There are no effective medications for treating viral intestinal infections. Over the counter anti-diarrhea medications are not recommended for children under age two, and should be used with caution in older children. These medications do not stop the body's loss of fluid and salt, but cause them to be retained *within* the intestine. When this occurs, your child can become dehydrated without your being aware of it, because the diarrhea *appears* to stop.

If vomiting occurs two or more times, consult the treatment outlined in the *Vomiting* section below. When your child has had no vomiting for eight hours, then follow the suggestions for diarrhea in this section.

Mild diarrhea. If your child has only a small amount of diarrhea, continue a normal diet but avoid full-strength fruit juices.

Frequent watery diarrhea in infants (under one year).

-Bottle-Fed Infants. Discontinue formula temporarily and start Infalyte in unlimited amounts. Continue for at least 5 hours and up to 24 hours if the diarrhea is severe (watery bowel movement every one to two hours). Return to formula (if your infant is bottle fed) within 6 to 24 hours. If diarrhea is still watery, a soy formula should be selected and continued until stools return to normal (often 7 to 20 days). Foods such as rice, cereal, strained bananas, mashed potatoes, applesauce and toast may be added at this time, in infants over four months old.

- Breast-fed infants. Continue to breast-feed at more frequent intervals. Offer Infalyte between feedings if urine production is decreased or your infant appears thirsty. Add solids as above.

- Frequent watery diarrhea in older children (over one year).

- Starchy foods are absorbed best. Rice, oatmeal, bread, noodles, mashed potatoes, carrots, applesauce, bananas, etc., are good choices. Pretzels, crackers, or brothy soups can help meet sodium needs.
- For fluids, use water (if solids are being consumed) of 1/2 strength fruit juice.
- Avoid milk. It is not absorbed well.

- Consider Infalyte if the diarrhea is severe and your child is not yet able to take solid food.

WHEN TO CALL

In the vast majority of cases, diarrhea will be a self-limited illness, requiring only support, time and patience. In these cases, you will be able to provide care at home without our consultation. However, complications can develop. Please call us if any of the following occur.

Please call us immediately if your child:

- Has severe diarrhea with no urine in 8 hours or very dry mouth.
- Has a large amount of blood in the stools.
- Has fever over 105 degrees. If a Thermoscan is used, recheck with a digital thermometer before calling.
- Is under 3 months old and has a fever over 100.4 degrees.
- Has severe, continuous (non-crampy) abdominal pain for greater than two hours.
- Seems very weak or poorly responsive.

Please call us during office hours if your child:

- Has severe diarrhea and is on antibiotics.
- Has at least a 100.4 degree fever longer than 72 hours.
- Has abdominal cramping greater than 12 hours.
- Has any blood or pus in the stool.
- Has any diarrhea longer than 2 week

