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## What is diarrhea?

Diarrhea is the increase in the looseness and number of bowel movements (stools). It has many causes. The most common cause is a virus.

- Diarrhea can be mild (a few loose or mushy stools) to severe (constant watery stools).
- A green stool is from the very quick passage of contents through the stomach and intestines.

## What causes diarrhea?

Some common causes include:

- Virus or stomach bug
- Side effects from antibiotics (medicines used to treat infections)

## What problems can diarrhea cause?

The real danger of diarrhea is that it can cause your child to become dehydrated. Your child may also have a mild fever or vomiting (throwing up). A child with fever, vomiting and diarrhea may get dehydrated more quickly.

## What is dehydration?

Dehydration happens when the body loses too much water. Signs of dehydration include:

- No urine in 6 hours in a baby 12 months old and younger.
- No urine in more than 8 hours in a child older than 12 months.
- No tears when crying.
- Sunken eyes.
- Dry lips and mouth.
- Looks weak or sluggish.

## What if my child is also vomiting?

Diarrhea often comes with vomiting (throwing up). If your child is also vomiting, treat it first until they have had no vomiting for 6 hours. Follow your doctor's advice.

## What is the treatment for diarrhea?

The goal of treatment is to keep your child from getting dehydrated. Your child's doctor will talk with you about specific care for your child. Some guidelines are included on page 2.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Diarrhea, continued

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## For babies:

- If you breastfeed, do so as you normally would. If this makes diarrhea worse, call the doctor.
- If you give formula or milk, do so as you normally would. If this makes diarrhea worse, call the doctor.
- **Do not** give **just** water to babies younger than 12 months of age unless your doctor tells you to do so.
- If your baby is eating solids, give them as usual.

## For children:

- Give extra fluids. Do not feed just clear liquids for longer than 4 to 6 hours.
  - Do not give diet drinks or sugary drinks like fruit juices, gelatin, Popsicles, frozen slushy drinks or sodas.
  - Do not give drinks with caffeine like sodas or teas.
  - Avoid red-colored drinks that may look like blood in the stool.
- Offer extra fluids with each loose or liquid stool. Diarrhea can make children very thirsty.
- For the most part, give foods as usual.
  - Avoid fatty, fried or spicy foods, such as ice cream, French fries and pizza.
  - Avoid high sugar foods and drinks, such as candy and Kool-Aid.
  - Add other foods as the diarrhea gets better.

## For babies and children:

- To help replace salt and sugar in the right amounts:
  - For babies **younger than** 6 months of age, give Pedialyte, Liquilyte, Enfalyte or a less costly store brand.
  - For babies and children **older than** 6 months of age:
    - Pour a 12-ounce bottle of Gatorade G2 Low Calorie drink into a clean pitcher. Do not use other types of Gatorade or other sports drinks.
    - Refill the G2 bottle with 12 ounces of tap water. Add this to the pitcher.
    - Add **EXACTLY** one-quarter (1/4) teaspoon of salt to the pitcher. Use a measuring spoon, not a kitchen spoon or soup spoon. If possible, have another adult check the amount with you. You do not want to use too little or too much salt.
    - Stir well with a mixing spoon.
- Do not give solid foods if your baby or child is also vomiting. Give small amounts of liquids often.

## What else do I need to know?

- Most often, there is no medical need to stop diarrhea with medicine. Do not give Pepto Bismol, Imodium, Kaopectate or other similar types of medicines. These medicines can sometimes cause problems. Give your child medicines to stop diarrhea only if advised by the doctor.

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# Diarrhea, continued

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- The doctor may advise you to give your child a probiotic. This can help to maintain a normal level of good bacteria in the stomach and intestines. Ask your pharmacist for help finding one if needed.
- Diarrhea can be very contagious (spreads easily from one person to another). To help keep germs from spreading to others:  
Wash your hands well with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after changing your baby's diaper or wiping your child's bottom.

## How can I help my child's skin clear?

You can help keep your child's skin clear by cleaning it well.

- Avoid using diaper wipes. Clean your child's diaper area or bottom gently and well with soap and water. Pat the skin dry with a clean towel.
- Apply a zinc-based ointment (such as Desitin or less costly store brand) thickly after cleaning. This helps keep the stool away from the skin.
- Wash your hands and diaper changing surfaces well after each diaper change.

## When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor **right away** if your child has one or more of these:

- Does not smile or play for even a few minutes every 4 hours
- Has blood or mucus in the stool
- Has signs of dehydration:
  - No urine in 6 hours in a baby 12 months old and younger
  - No urine in more than 8 hours in a child older than 12 months
  - No tears when crying
  - Sunken eyes
  - Dry lips and mouth
- Becomes weak or sluggish, or looks or acts sick
- Seems to be breathing hard or fast even after the fever has been treated with medicine
- Has stomach pain that continues between each loose or liquid stool
- Has pain on the right side of his belly
- Is not eating his regular diet without fatty or spicy foods in 48 hours
- Has been on antibiotics recently
- Has a yellow color of the skin (jaundice)

Also call your child's doctor if you have any questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.

**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

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