



# Diarrhea

Patient and Family Education

---

**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Your child's doctor or a member of your child's health care team will talk with you about specific care for your child.**

## **What is diarrhea?**

Diarrhea is the sudden increase in the looseness and number of bowel movements (BMs) or 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 problems can diarrhea cause?**

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

## **What is dehydration?**

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

- No urine in six hours in an infant younger than 12 months old
- No urine in more than eight hours in a child older than 12 months old
- No tears when crying
- Sunken eyes
- Dry lips and mouth

## **What if my child is also vomiting?**

Diarrhea often comes with vomiting. If your child is vomiting, treat it first until he has had no vomiting for six hours. Follow your doctor's advice and the Vomiting teaching sheet.

## **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 general guidelines include giving extra fluids.

### **Extra fluids**

Give your child extra fluids but keep giving your child his regular food too. Offer fluids with each loose or liquid stool. Diarrhea can make children very thirsty.

- Extra fluids that help to replace salt and sugar in the right amounts include:
  - Give babies **less than** 3 months old ½ strength Lytren, Pedialyte, Liquilyte or Infalyte or a less costly store brand. (1 part drink and 1 part water)

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

## ***Diarrhea, continued***

---

- Give babies and children **over** 3 months old full-strength **Gatorade G-2 Low Calorie** to drink. **Do not use other types of Gatorade or other sports drinks.**
- Do not use **just** water for a baby less than 12 months of age unless told to do so by your child's doctor.
- For all babies and children:
  - Do not give diet drinks, fruit juices, gelatin, Popsicles, frozen slushy drinks, carbonated drinks, sodas, teas or water.
  - Avoid red colored drinks that may look like blood in the stool.

### ***Diet for breastfed babies:***

Breastfeed your baby as you normally would. If this makes the diarrhea worse, call your child's doctor.

### ***Diet for infants on solids, or children:***

- Do not feed **just** clear liquids for longer than 4 to 6 hours.
- First, give extra clear liquids and foods your child usually eats.
  - 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. If increasing milk or formula seems to make the diarrhea worse, call your child's doctor.

**Note:** If your child is also vomiting, do not give him solid foods. Give small amounts of liquids often as noted in the Vomiting teaching sheet.

### ***What else do I need to know?***

- There is usually no medical need to “stop” the diarrhea with medicine. These medicines can sometimes cause problems. Do not give Pepto Bismol, Immodium, Kaopectate or other similar types of medicines. Give your child medicines to stop diarrhea only if advised by his doctor.
- Your child's doctor may also advise a probiotic. It is given to help maintain a normal level of good bacteria in the stomach and colon.

Diarrhea can be very contagious (spreads easily from one person to another).

- Wash your hands after changing your baby's diaper or wiping your child's bottom.
- Make sure that you and your child both wash your hands after using the toilet and before eating.

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

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

- Avoid 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 thickly after cleaning. This helps keep the stool away from the skin.
- Wash your hands and diaper changing surfaces well after each diaper change.

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

## ***Diarrhea, continued***

---

### ***When should I call the doctor?***

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

- He does not smile or play for even a few minutes every 4 hours
- You see blood or mucus in his stool (bowel movement).
- There are signs of dehydration (drying out):
  - No urine in six hours in an infant younger than 12 months old
  - No urine in more than eight hours in a child older than 12 months old
  - No tears when crying
  - Sunken eyes
  - Dry lips and mouth
- He becomes weak, sluggish or looks or acts sick.
- He seems to be breathing hard or fast even after the fever has been treated with medicine.
- Stomach pain that continues between diarrhea episodes.
- He has right-sided stomach pain.
- He is not eating his regular diet without fatty or spicy foods in 48 hours.

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

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