

Pediatric Diarrhea

DEFINITION

Diarrhea is an increase in the frequency of loose and watery stools. Loose stools can be caused by a change in diet, such as an increased intake of juices or fruits. Medications or certain illnesses also can cause diarrhea, but viruses cause most episodes of diarrhea. Your child may have fever, vomiting and irritability with a virus. An occasional loose stool should not cause concern.

Most children will have an occasional episode of diarrhea - it usually improves in a few days without making a change in the diet or giving medications. Antidiarrheal medications are not recommended for young children and may be harmful. While most episodes of diarrhea will go away in a few days, the main risk of diarrhea is dehydration. Your goal in caring for your child is to provide comfort and prevent dehydration.

TREATMENT AND CARE

- Continue giving breast milk or formula
- Avoid foods that cause loose stools, such as fruit and fruit juices
- Continue your child's usual diet and increase fluids. Commercially prepared oral rehydration solutions such as Pedialyte[®], Ricelyte[®] or other generic brands will help. For older children, you may substitute a solution of half Gatorade[®] and half water.

ADDITIONAL TREATMENT - VOMITING

If your child vomits and is younger than 6 months of age, **call your physician**. Give children older than 6 months one to two teaspoons of oral rehydration solution every five minutes until vomiting stops. If your child drinks larger amounts while he or she is still vomiting, his or her stomach will expand and vomiting will continue.

ADVANCING YOUR CHILD'S DIET

After your child's diarrhea has slowed and/or your child has not vomited for six hours, you may begin increasing solid food. Avoid high sugar foods such as Jello[®], ice cream and sweet cereals. Also, avoid fried foods. Listed below are good foods after an episode of vomiting and diarrhea:

- Cooked cereals, crackers
- Yogurt
- Potatoes, noodles, rice
- Cooked meat.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEHYDRATION

- Extreme fussiness
- Extreme sleepiness
- Sunken eyes
- Refusal to drink

- Dark urine
- Urination frequency of less than once every eight hours
- Dry sticky lips and mouth.

PREVENTION

- Good hand washing is the most important prevention for your child as well as any caregiver - teach your child to wash his or her hands after using the toilet and before eating
- Limit the amount of sweetened beverages and juices your child drinks
- Feed your child yogurt when taking an antibiotic
- Cook all foods thoroughly and refrigerate all uncooked foods and leftovers immediately
- Thoroughly clean all work surfaces before and after food preparation.

Most episodes of diarrhea will resolve gradually as long as you take steps to prevent dehydration. If you have concerns about your child's condition, please call your physician.

CONSIDER NOTIFYING YOUR PHYSICIAN IF:

- Your child is less than 6 months of age
- You see signs of dehydration
- Your child vomits and does not retain any fluids
- Your child's stool has blood in it
- Your child has severe stomach pain.