

Diarrhoea

This is when you have watery/ semi-liquid bowel movements occurring three or more times per day. There may be crampy abdominal pains that ease each time diarrhoea is passed. Vomiting and fever may also occur. This can be caused by viral infections via person to person contact (gastroenteritis) or occasionally by eating food that has gone off (food poisoning). Most are self-limiting and will resolve.

How to help yourself

The symptoms should clear over several days but in the meantime here are some steps you can take:

- **Adults and children over 10yrs** should drink around 200ml of clear fluid i.e. dilute squashes or apple juice after each bout of diarrhoea as well as their usual fluid intake.
- In babies under 1 yr and the very elderly, it is important to replace lost salts by using **Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS)**. Ask the pharmacist for this as there are different brand names. They can be mixed into fruit juices to make them more palatable for children.
- It is better not to starve, so if you feel hungry, try vegetable soup mixed with soggy rice which can help to make the stool more solid, or other foods high in carbohydrate i.e. bread, pasta or potatoes.
- **Anti-diarrhoeal medications** i.e. Loperamide are best avoided as it can cause abdominal cramps and constipation. If you absolutely need to reduce your frequency to the toilet, i.e. to go outdoors, then it can be used temporarily. However, do not give to children under 12 yrs' old, if you have a fever or are passing blood with diarrhoea.

- Some research has shown that taking **probiotics i.e. Yakult** can reduce the duration of diarrhoea by around 1 day. These cannot be prescribed on the NHS but can be purchased from supermarkets or health food stores. They work by replenishing the bowel with good bacteria to fight off the infection caused by harmful organisms.
- Reduce the risk of spreading infection amongst your other family members by washing hands thoroughly especially after changing nappies.

Babies

Breastfed babies - continue to breastfeed. Increase the number of feeds and give your baby extra water based fluids after each soiled nappy. You may use a teaspoon if the baby does not accept the bottle.

Bottle-feeding - continue with normal feeds.

Children - Fluid intake

To *prevent* dehydration, the child should be drinking their usual daily intake. In addition, as a guide, give the following after each loose stool (each time they pass some diarrhoea) to replace the fluid lost by the diarrhoea:

- Children under two: 50-100 ml (a quarter to half a large cup) of fluid.
- Children aged 2-10 years: 100-200 ml (a half to one large cup) of fluid.

Contact your doctor:

- If you have a high temperature with diarrhoea
- If you caught an infection from abroad
- If the diarrhoea has been going on for more than 1 week and you have followed the above advice.
- In children under 1 yr, if symptoms persist longer than 2 days.

Contact your doctor immediately:

- If there is persistent vomiting for more than 2 days
- If there is blood in the diarrhoea
- If your baby is drowsy or confused
- If your baby's nappy has not been wet for 12 hours
- If your baby is vomiting all the time
- If your baby has a fever.