

Diarrhea

--from Children's Physician Network's *Pediatric Advisor*

What is diarrhea?

Diarrhea can be caused by a virus or bacteria in your child's intestines. This makes your child's stools looser and come more often. Mild diarrhea is when your child has a few loose stools. When the stools are watery, the diarrhea is severe.

When your child has diarrhea, it is important to make sure your child does not lose too much water. If your child has these signs, he or she could be dehydrated:

- Dry, sticky mouth.
- No tears.
- No urine in over 8 hours (over 12 hours if more than 1 year old).
- Dark urine.

Taking care of the diarrhea can keep your child from developing dehydration.

What is the cause?

Diarrhea is usually caused by a viral infection. Sometimes it is caused by bacteria or parasites. Sometimes a food allergy or drinking too much fruit juice may cause diarrhea. Antibiotics can upset the natural balance of bacteria in the digestive tract.

What should I feed my child?

Extra fluids and diet changes work best. **Note:** One loose stool can mean nothing. Don't change your child's diet until your child has had several loose stools.

Taking Care of Watery (Severe) Diarrhea

If your baby is less than 1 year old and bottle-fed:

- Give him formula more often than you would normally and as much as he wants. Fluids prevent dehydration.
- Give your baby Pedialyte instead of formula for 4 to 6 hours.
- After 4 to 6 hours, give your baby formula again. Offer Pedialyte in addition to the formula feeding only if the urine becomes dark colored or passed infrequently.
- Switch to a soy formula if the diarrhea is severe and doesn't improve in 3 days.
- If your baby is over 4 months old, continue rice cereal, and strained bananas.

If your baby is less than 1 year old and breast-fed:

- Breast-feed more often.
- If your baby is over 4 months old, continue rice cereal, and strained bananas.

- Offer Pedialyte between breast-feedings only if your baby does not urinate as often as usual or has dark-colored urine.

If your child is over 1 year old:

- Give dried cereals, grains, bread, crackers, rice, pasta, and mashed potatoes. Yogurt is also good for diarrhea.
- Give water or diluted Gatorade as the main fluids.
- Caution: If your child does not want to eat solid food, give your child milk or formula rather than water.

Taking Care of Mild Diarrhea

- You can keep giving formula to your baby. Have older children drink extra water, as well as milk.
- Stay away from all fruit juices.
- Feed your child cereal, breads, crackers, rice, mashed potatoes, and pasta.

When should I call my child's healthcare provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- Your child has not urinated in 8 hours (12 hours for older children) or has a very dry mouth or no tears.
- There is any blood in the diarrhea.
- Your child has had more than 8 stools in the last 8 hours.
- The diarrhea is watery AND your child also throws up repeatedly.
- Your child starts acting very sick.

Call during office hours if:

- There is mucus or pus in the stools.
- Your child has a fever that lasts more than 3 days.
- The mild diarrhea lasts more than 2 weeks.
- You have other concerns or questions.

- Your child shows any signs of dehydration (such as no urine in over 8-10 hours, very dry mouth, no tears when crying).
- Your child vomits up blood or something that looks like coffee grounds.
- Your child vomits repeatedly AND also has watery diarrhea.
- Your child has abdominal pain when not vomiting.
- Your child is confused or difficult to awaken.
- Your child starts acting very sick.