

Dietary Treatment for Vomiting and Diarrhea

Diarrhea may be defined as an increase in volume, fluidity, or frequency of bowel movements relative to the usual pattern established for a particular individual. Diarrhea and vomiting cause a loss of body minerals including sodium, potassium, magnesium and chloride. In most acute cases, the illness is brief, at most an inconvenience and for the otherwise health adult, it can be easily managed.

What steps can be taken to avoid dehydration?

To avoid dehydration caused by vomiting and diarrhea, it may be necessary to drink at least an extra pint or so of fluid per day. In case of acute diarrhea, food should be withheld and the diet restricted to clear liquids such as water, tea, gelatin, clear broths or bouillon. It is effective to begin with ice chips and if your body tolerates this liquid begins to slowly drink a solution of 1 part Gatorade to 1 part water to protect against electrolyte imbalance.

What should be avoided?

Milk and milk products should be withheld. In acute vomiting and diarrhea, the gastrointestinal system is unable to digest and absorb some of the sugars in milk thus making the disease worse. Aspirin or other pain killers are likely to aggravate the condition. It should also be kept in mind that antibiotics tend to upset the equilibrium of intestinal bacteria and cause a worsening of symptoms.

What to do after Diarrhea has subsided?

Diarrhea may be caused or worsened by one's diet therefore it is important to modify your diet after the diarrhea has stopped completely. Eating according to the BRAT, low fiber contents diet, after diarrhea symptoms have subsided may be tolerated in small portions.

BRAT stands for:

Bananas
Rice (or other starchy food)
Applesauce
Toast

In the convalescence stage, raw fruits, vegetables and whole grain cereals should be avoided as these foods tend to add more bulk to the intestinal contents. A normal diet may be resumed gradually while avoiding milk products, alcohol, and spicy or fatty foods for several days, preferably for at least a week. Foods high in fiber such as raw fruits and vegetables should be added back to your diet last.

When should I consult a health care practitioner?

In general, if diarrhea involves more than five to ten bowel movements per day, is persistent for more than three to four days, is associated with blood or large amounts of mucus in the bowel movements, or is accompanied by fever, a health care practitioner should be consulted.

Are there medications available to reduce the symptoms?

Because viruses cause most cases of diarrhea, antibiotics will not work. Even the more severe diarrhea caused by bacteria will usually go away in a few days even without antibiotics. In fact, antibiotics appear to make some bacterial diarrhea worse, specifically those caused by the *E. coli* bacterium (often a source of food poisoning).

Antibiotics may benefit some adults with diarrhea. If selected carefully, antibiotics may decrease the severity of illness and shorten the duration of symptoms. If you have recently traveled out of the country or have been camping (and may have been exposed to contaminated water in the wilderness), your health care provider may prescribe specific medication used to treat traveler's diarrhea or certain intestinal parasites.

Your provider may recommend using over-the-counter antidiarrheal medication. These drugs, such as loperamide (Imodium) and bismuth subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol) may help some people with diarrhea, but should be avoided by others. Antidiarrheal medications are not usually recommended for infants and children with diarrhea.

Points to Remember

- Diarrhea is a common problem that usually resolves on its own.
- Diarrhea is dangerous if a person becomes dehydrated.
- Causes include viral, bacterial, or parasitic infections; food intolerance; reactions to medicine; intestinal diseases; and functional bowel disorders.
- Treatment involves replacing lost fluids and electrolytes. Depending on the cause of the problem, a person might also need medication to stop the diarrhea or treat an infection
- Call the doctor if a person with diarrhea has severe pain in the abdomen or rectum, a fever of 102 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, blood in the stool, signs of dehydration, or diarrhea for more than 3 days