University of Chicago
SCC
Student Care Center

SYMPTOMS		DIAGNOSIS		SELF-CARE
BEGIN HERE 1. Do you have diarrhea and are also nauseated or vomiting?	No	Go to Question 10.*		
Yes				
2. Did your symptoms begin 30 minutes to 2 hours after eating or drinking dairy products?	Yes	Your symptoms may be caused by LACTOSE INTOLERANCE. People who have this condition have trouble digesting the sugar in milk and other dairy products.		If you think you have lactose intolerance, talk to your doctor. He or she may recommend taking lactase enzyme tablets or drops to help prevent problems.
No				
3. Have you eaten food that might be spoiled, or did someone else eat the same food and become ill too?	Yes	You may have FOOD POISONING. Other symptoms of food poisoning may include headache, fever and chills, and weakness.		Most problems caused by food poisoning will clear up within 12 to 48 hours. To avoid dehydration, add liquids slowly beginning with ice chips and then diluted gatorade. If your symptoms last longer than 48 hours, or you're very uncomfortable, call your doctor.
No				
4. Have you traveled recently to another country?	Yes	You may have TRAVELER'S DIARRHEA, which is caused by contaminated food or drink.		Over-the-counter medicines may help relieve your symptoms. Avoid alcohol, caffeine and dairy products. If your symptoms persist, call your doctor.
No				
5. Do you have pain in the lower left side of your abdomen, especially after you eat foods that are difficult to digest?	Yes	You may have a condition that affects the intestines, such as DIVERTICULOSIS or DIVERTICULITIS.		See your doctor. A diet high in FIBER may help relieve your symptoms.
No				
6. Is your diarrhea watery, and do you have a headache or muscle aches and a low fever?	Yes	You may have viral GASTROENTERITIS, also called the stomach flu.		Get plenty of rest. Ease back into eating with bland foods and clear liquids. To avoid dehydration, add liquids slowly beginning with ice chips and then diluted gatorade. Contact your doctor if you have a high fever or your symptoms last for more than 10 days.
No				
7. Do you have persistent severe abdominal cramps, gas and watery diarrhea followed by greasy stools?	Yes	You may have a form of BACTERIAL DIARRHEA or a parasite (GIARDIA).		Call your doctor promptly. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Avoid caffeine.

No

8. Do you have a fever, and are you experiencing pain in the middle or upper abdomen that radiates to your back?

Yes → These may be symptoms of GALLBLADDER DISEASE or PANCREATITIS. → Call your doctor promptly.

No

9. Are you bloated, and are you experiencing severe lower abdominal pain or cramping?

Yes → These could be symptoms of a problem such as an INTESTINAL OBSTRUCTION or blockage. → SEE YOUR DOCTOR RIGHT AWAY, OR GO TO THE NEAREST EMERGENCY ROOM.

No

*10. Are you currently taking an antibiotic or other new medicine?

Yes → Your diarrhea may be caused by the MEDICINE. → Talk to your doctor about the antibiotic or medicine you're taking. He or she may be able to prescribe a medicine that won't cause diarrhea. However, don't stop taking your current medicine unless your doctor tells you to.

No

11. Do you have diarrhea along with gas, bloating and stomach pains every time you eat certain foods?

Yes → MALABSORPTION problems, such as CELIAC DISEASE, can cause food-related diarrhea. → Avoid the foods that make you sick, and discuss the problem with your doctor.

No

12. Do you have frequent bowel movements mixed with blood or mucus, and abdominal pain and cramping?

Yes → You may have INFLAMMATORY BOWEL DISEASE or CROHN'S DISEASE. → See your doctor. He or she will determine what treatment is right for you. Drink plenty of fluids, and avoid foods that make your symptoms worse.

No

13. Do your bowel movements alternate between constipation and diarrhea, and does your condition seem to get worse when you're under stress?

Yes → IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME or SPASTIC COLON may be the cause of your diarrhea. → Gradually increase the amount of FIBER in your diet, and drink plenty of fluids. If you see blood in your stools, call your doctor.

No

14. Have you had chronic constipation but suddenly experienced watery diarrhea that leaks out?

Yes → You may have a FECAL IMPACTION, a large mass of dry, hard stool that is trapped in the rectum. → See your doctor.

No

Contact your doctor for further information.

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