

Diarrhea

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 half-strength Gatorade as the main fluids for 6 hours.
- 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.

Call your child's doctor right away 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 your child's doctor 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.

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Diet for Diarrhea

What is diarrhea?

Diarrhea is frequent loose bowel movements. If your child has severe diarrhea, her body can lose too much fluid and she can get dehydrated. Dehydration can be very dangerous, especially for babies and young children. Your child may also be losing minerals that the body needs to keep working normally.

Does my child's diet need to change?

You do not need to change your child's diet, but it is important to replace the liquid your child loses in the diarrhea. It's OK for your baby to keep drinking breast milk or formula, but give your baby extra fluids. The best fluids to give are oral rehydration solutions, which replace fluids and minerals. Older children with severe diarrhea should be given an oral rehydration solution, plus water and other clear liquids. Clear liquids include water, weak tea, fruit juice mixed half and half with water, Jell-O, or light-colored soft drinks without caffeine (like lemon-lime soda). Stir soda until the bubbles are gone (the bubbles can make vomiting worse). Don't give your child dark carbonated drinks, full-strength fruit juice, or sports drinks that are high in sugar, which can make diarrhea worse.

Foods that are easy to digest may be useful for a short time and help your child return to a normal diet. Good choices are:

- Jell-O
- Soda crackers
- Toast
- Plain noodles
- Rice
- Cooked cereal
- Baked or mashed potatoes
- Soft-boiled eggs
- Applesauce
- Bananas