Diarrhea Treatment

You can take care of your acute diarrhea at home. In fact, diarrhea will usually go away in 2-3 days without specific medical therapy.

Self-Care at Home

Adults: Make sure you do not become dehydrated. Drink plenty of fluids.

- The type of drink is not as important as simply replenishing lost water. But avoid milk. It will make diarrhea worse. Diet soft drinks do not provide the calories that dehydrated people may need, so regular soda or soft drinks may be selected to replace lost water.
- Try to eat. The food does not need to be bland, but try to avoid greasy or fatty foods. Infants and children should be encouraged to eat bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast—the BRAT diet—a combination used for decades to treat diarrhea. If diarrhea is accompanied by nausea, suck on ice chips until the nausea stops. After the diarrhea stops, avoid alcoholic beverages and spicy foods for 2 more days.
- Continue your usual activities if you are mildly ill with diarrhea but avoid strenuous exercise until you feel better because it increases the risk of dehydration.

Children: Dehydration is also a concern.

- Very young infants pose special problems because of their increased risk of dehydration. They should be offered a bottle frequently. Solutions such as Pedialyte may be more appealing than water. These fluids also contain necessary salts lost with diarrhea. But avoid salt tablets. They may worsen diarrhea and should never be used.
- Children with frequent stools, fever, or vomiting should stay home from school and daycare until these symptoms go away. In addition to allowing the child to rest and recover, this also helps prevent other children from becoming ill.
Medical Treatment

To replace fluids, the health care provider will often start an intravenous line if you are dehydrated and cannot eat or drink. Salt solutions flow through the intravenous line, which replaces the lost fluids and often brings quick relief.

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.
- If you have severe diarrhea, especially if you are dehydrated, you may require hospitalization to receive intravenous fluids and to be observed.

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