

DIARRHEA

Diarrhea is the sudden increase in the frequency of bowel movements, and a change in their consistency. If your child has diarrhea it can be very challenging to keep changing all of those diapers. Diarrhea is usually caused by a virus and gets better by itself within about a week or so. A child with viral diarrhea may start with a fever and vomiting for the first few days, or they may just have several loose stools per day.

The main risk of diarrhea is dehydration. As long as we can keep a child taking fluids, they usually do not get dehydrated. The goal is to prevent dehydration by giving enough oral fluids to keep up with the fluid lost in the diarrhea. Don't expect a quick return to solid stools.

It is very helpful if you pull out a blank sheet of paper and keep track of the episodes of diarrhea that occur over a 24 hour period. Most important is to mark down the episodes of urination. We can gauge the risks of dehydration based on how frequently a child is urinating. If other people are also changing diapers, please ask them to keep track as well. Other signs of dehydration to notice include a very dry mouth and the absence of tears when upset.

Mild Diarrhea--The diarrhea will usually last for about 3-6 days. Occasionally it may last longer, but as long as the child acts well and is taking adequate fluids, loose stools are not a great concern. Most children can continue to eat a normal diet including formula or milk, while they have mild diarrhea. Breastfeeding should continue as well. Reduce the intake of fruit juices since this may increase diarrhea.

Moderate Diarrhea- A child with moderate diarrhea can easily be taken care of at home by paying close attention to what they are drinking and how they are urinating. It is important to keep track of how many times a day they are urinating. If you see any blood in the stool or the child has a persistently high fever, you should talk to the advice nurse.

If children are having frequent watery diarrhea and not drinking well, you can give them oral rehydration solution such as Pedialyte or Infalyte. These are not necessary for the child who is cooperating well with drinking a variety of fluids, urinating well and also ingesting some salty foods like crackers. The choice of solids to feed your child is a key factor. Starchy foods are absorbed well and help to thicken up the stool. Give carbohydrates such as cereals, oatmeal, bread, noodles, mashed potatoes, carrots, applesauce, crackers, or pretzels. Avoid fruit juice and things with lots of fat since these may make the diarrhea worse.

Diarrhea is very contagious. Excellent hand washing after changing diapers or toileting is very important to keep everyone else from getting the virus. Diarrhea can also cause irritating diaper rash, so clean well after each stool and protect the skin with a protective layer of your choice of a diaper rash formula.

Call the advice nurse if there is:

- Reduced urine production. (none in 8 hours, or less than 4 in 24 hours)
- Bloody stools
- Persistently high fever
- Extreme thirst
- Frequent vomiting.
- No tears when crying