



# Diarrhea in children

Diarrhea is when you pass stool many times a day, and it is watery, runny, and loose. (Passing stool is called having a “bowel movement.”)

Diarrhea is one way your child’s body fights infection. Diarrhea can also clean out your child’s intestines when he or she eats something bad. Children get diarrhea often, especially mild diarrhea.

Breastfed babies have many soft bowel movements in a day. They may pass stool every time they eat. Twelve or more bowel movements a day is OK. This is not diarrhea. Bottlefed babies don’t have as many bowel movements. Even so, 1 or 2 loose stools is not diarrhea. In a baby, diarrhea is many very runny bowel movements.



## CAUSES

- Infection by viruses, bacteria, or parasites (A virus is the most common cause. Your child may also throw up, have a fever, have a runny nose, and/or feel very tired. Children can catch these viruses at school or daycare.)
- Eating too much of foods they are not used to
- Food poisoning
- Allergies, such as milk allergy
- Taking too many laxatives. (Example: Teens trying to lose weight sometimes take laxatives.)
- Taking some medicines. (Example: Antibiotics.)
- Getting upset
- Drinking bad water or food while traveling
- Catching an infection from someone else who has been travelling

Watch out for dehydration. Dehydration is when your body doesn’t have enough water. This is very important if your child is throwing up, too. Dehydration can happen very fast in babies and young children.

# Diarrhea in children



## TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Is the person with diarrhea a baby or young child? Does the baby or child have any of these problems with the diarrhea?

- Sunken eyes
- Dry mouth and dry skin
- Crying that has few or no tears
- Dry diaper for more than 3 hours in a baby
- Passing no urine for more than 6 hours in a child
- Feeling weak and tired
- Easily upset or very fussy

**NO**

**YES** ➔

**GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE:  
CALL 911**



Do any of these problems happen with the diarrhea?

- Blood or pus in the stool
- Very bad pain in the stomach or rectum
- Acts very sick
- Vomits often

**NO**

**YES** ➔

**GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



Has the diarrhea lasted 48 hours or more? And/or has your child thrown up just water 3 or more times? Or has your child refused to drink clear fluids?

**NO**

**YES** ➔

**SEE DOCTOR**



With diarrhea, does your child have a fever?

**NO**

**YES** ➔

**SEE DOCTOR**



Has your child taken any medicine? (Medicine your child takes may not work because of the diarrhea. Or a medicine may be giving your child the diarrhea.)

**NO**

**YES** ➔

**CALL DOCTOR**

**CONTINUE IN NEXT COLUMN**



If your child is a baby, is he or she getting the diarrhea more than 8 times a day?

**NO**

**YES** ➔

**CALL DOCTOR**



Did the diarrhea come after bad constipation? (Constipation is when you can't go to the bathroom.) Does your child often get diarrhea stains on their underwear?

**NO**

**YES** ➔

**CALL DOCTOR**



Has your child been near someone with bacterial diarrhea? (Bacterial diarrhea usually happens to people travelling in other countries.) Or did your child get diarrhea after they ate or drank something in a different country?

**NO**

**YES** ➔

**CALL DOCTOR**



Does your child have diarrhea and does he or she go to a day care center?

**NO**

**YES** ➔

**CALL DOCTOR**



Does your child get diarrhea often, even if it goes away on its own?

**NO**

**YES** ➔

**CALL DOCTOR**



**USE SELF-CARE**



## SELF-CARE

### Signs of Dehydration

- Thirsty
- Dry mouth and dry skin
- Dry diaper or passed little or no urine
- Confused or dizzy
- Weak or has a weak cry

### If Your Child Shows Signs of Dehydration

- Get medical care fast.
- Stop solid foods. Give clear liquids. Give the liquids the doctor tells you to give.
- For bottlefed babies and children under 2, give over-the-counter mixtures like Pedialyte®. They have the right amount of water, minerals, and sugar to help with dehydration.
- For breastfed babies, nurse the baby. But give only as much breast milk as the baby wants. Feed every 2 hours. Ask the baby's doctor about giving water and over-the-counter mixtures.
- For children over age 2, give up to 6 cups of liquid per day. Good choices are:
  - Over-the-counter mixtures, like Pedialyte®
  - Milk
  - Water, but don't give just water. Give other clear liquids, too.



- Don't give your child very cold or hot liquids or boiled milk.
- Don't give your child liquids with lots of sugar, like soft drinks, gelatins, grape juice, and apple juice. These can make the diarrhea worse.
- Don't give just clear liquids for more than 24 hours. Start normal meals within 12 hours.

### If There Are No Signs of Dehydration

- Feed your child normal meals. Your child may want to eat smaller amounts than normal.
- Don't give fatty or fried foods, or full-strength fruit juice.
- Don't give your child foods that upset their stomach.
- Don't feed your child just a B.R.A.T. diet. This was an old way to treat diarrhea. B.R.A.T. stands for ripe Bananas, Rice, Applesauce, and dry Toast. It is OK to give your child these foods with other ones, though.
- Don't let your child exercise too hard until the diarrhea is all gone.
- Don't give your child Kapectate® or other over-the-counter medicines to stop diarrhea unless your child's doctor says it's OK. And, don't give your child Pepto-Bismol®. Like aspirin, Pepto-Bismol® has salicylates which have been linked to Reye's Syndrome, a condition that can kill.
- To keep diarrhea germs from spreading, follow these tips:
  - Make sure your child washes his or her hands after using the toilet.
  - Give your child paper towels to dry their hands.
  - Have everyone at home wash their hands often, so the infection doesn't spread.
  - Wash your hands after changing diapers or washing your child.

### Steps to Avoid Food Poisoning

- Wash your hands with warm soapy water for 20 seconds before you handle food or items used to prepare foods.
- Use clean tools and surfaces when you prepare foods.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, eggs, and fish away from other foods, utensils, and serving plates.
- Wash your hands after you touch or prepare raw meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, or eggs. Wash the items used to prepare these foods, too. Use hot soapy water or put them in the dishwasher.
- Don't mix raw foods with cooked and ready-to-eat foods when you shop, prepare, and store foods.
- Store foods that can spoil in the refrigerator. Use refrigerated leftovers within 3 to 4 days.
- Don't eat raw eggs or eggs that aren't cooked enough. Don't eat foods with raw eggs like cookie batter.
- Cook foods to a safe temperature.
- Keep hot foods hot (higher than 140°F) and cold foods cold (40°F or lower).
- Ask the doctor about the rotavirus vaccine if your child has not yet received it.

