

Diarrhea

Diarrhea is usually part of a vomiting illness, described above. It often lingers on, sometimes for days to weeks after the vomiting is over. Diarrhea caused by a virus can be watery, runny, loose, brown, yellow, green, or orange. It often smells terrible. There is no treatment for viral diarrhea other than to let it run its course. We do not usually run tests on diarrhea that appears to be caused by a virus. This is because by the time we get the test results back, the diarrhea is mostly gone, and we don't have a treatment for viral diarrhea anyway. We do not recommend using antidiarrheal medicines such as Kaopectate or Immodium. These tend to cause increased gas, abdominal distension, and discomfort for the child. Additionally these medicines hold the virus in the body and may end up prolonging the illness.

If there is a significant amount of blood mixed into the stool, a bacteria instead of a virus may cause this, and then we will usually run tests to detect it. If the diarrhea is not associated with "stomach flu" then we have to look at other possible causes. Children commonly get diarrhea from an antibiotic. This is treated by diet, as described below. Toddlers often have diarrhea, and this is related to their diet. If they have too much juice or fruit they will have loose stools, the next day the diet is starchier and the stools are thicker. This type of diarrhea will resolve on its own as the child gets older.

How to handle diarrhea at home:

Assuming the vomiting that often accompanies diarrhea has mostly stopped, the way to handle diarrhea is with clear fluids and bland foods. When the diarrhea is frequent, you should give your child a drink of a clear liquid after every stool (Pedialyte, diluted juice, white grape juice is good, water). If you are breastfeeding, breast milk is also ok. If your child won't take anything but his/her bottle of formula or milk, then try it. If it makes the diarrhea worse you could dilute the bottle with water or Pedialyte for a maximum of 24 hours.

The classic diet for diarrhea is the "BRAT" diet. This stands for bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast. Other good foods are yogurt, dry cereal, crackers, pasta, and bread. There is a food additive called "acidophilus" that can be purchased in capsules at the pharmacy or in powder form at the health food store. This can be given three times a day to try to replenish the normal bacterial flora in the intestine. There is no strict dosing for acidophilus. You could try a teaspoon of the powder, or the contents of one capsule three times a day, either mixed in food or drink.

When to call or come in to the office because of diarrhea:

If your child is dehydrated (see the vomiting section, above), or has bloody stools you should bring him or her into the office.