

Patient Advisory

Pediatric diarrhea

About diarrhea

Diarrhea is a recent change in the consistency and character of stools with an increase in stool frequency to twice the usual number in infants or three or more loose stools per day in older children. In a breast fed infant it is defined as an increased frequency of stool as observed by the mother.

Common Causes

Some of the common causes of diarrhea in children are:

- Viral infection is the most common cause of diarrhea in children. It is characterized by watery diarrhea without blood. Often accompanied with vomiting and fever.
- Bacterial infection- either invasive or produce toxins
- Protozoan infection
- Dietary disturbances and
- Antibiotic administration

Diagnosis of the causes of Diarrhea

A medical history and a physical examination are usually sufficient to diagnose the condition. Occasionally your physician may conduct some tests to diagnose the underlying pathology if the diarrhea doesn't respond to initial treatment or the condition worsens.

When to contact the clinic or hospital

Contact your doctor immediately or visit the hospital if the following warning signs appear:

- The child has not passed urine for last 8 to 12 hours or has passed a small amount of dark urine
- Not accepting any oral feed for more than a few hours
- Profuse diarrhea (passing more than twice the usual number of stools in infants and more than five watery stools in older children)
- Blood in the stool
- Persistent vomiting
- Severe headache, neck pain or neck stiffness observed
- Presence of high fever or persistent fever
- Presence of convulsions
- Attacks of crying with pallor in an infant
- Abdominal distension
- Increased lethargy or decreased activity
- Excessive sleepiness

Treatment

The treatment for watery diarrhea includes fluid replacement, zinc supplements and appropriate nutrition according to age. Doctor may prescribe medications to resolve other symptoms associated with diarrhea. Non-sedative antiemetics may be given for vomiting in children.

Antibiotics are not warranted as first line medication for diarrhea in children and you should only take them if your doctor prescribes them.

Care and Prevention

You may follow some simple measures to prevent and reduce the impact of diarrhea:

- Give your child extra liquids to drink. Homemade ORS, coconut water, rice kanji, dal, chaas, lassi with salt etc are recommended.
- ORS can be prepared at home by mixing eight teaspoonfuls of sugar, one teaspoonful of table salt with or without a lemon squeezed in one litre of water.
- Practice exclusive breastfeeding for infants < than 5 months of age.
- Do not give tea, colas, fruits or fluids with extra sugar.
- Milk is usually recommended unless the child has prolonged diarrhea or lactose intolerance.
- Avoid over the counter medications to control diarrhea.
- A bland diet is recommended for 1 – 2 days. Give food like khicdi (rice gruel), rice and curd, boiled vegetables, soups and bananas.
- Wash hands with soap and water before handling food and after using the toilet.
- Discourage habits like nail-biting in children.
- Use water for drinking that is from a safe source or is purified. In case water is stored, keep it in clean and covered containers.
- Wash all food that is consumed raw in clean, preferably warm water.
- Eat freshly prepared food from clean utensils.
- Store food hygienically in clean, covered containers at optimum temperature.
- Reheat stored food well and ensure it is not spoilt before consuming.
- Use proper sanitary latrine. Ensure that the latrine is clean and dry after use and is placed away from water sources.
- Dispose waste and refuse in covered dustbins away from water sources or food.
- Protect food from insects and animals as they carry pathogenic organisms and are potential sources of contamination of food.
- Inform the nearest primary health centre (PHC) if there is an outbreak of diarrhea in the neighborhood.
- Ensure that all the children are completely immunized.

Caution Notice

This information is not a substitute for a Doctor's advice. Only your Doctor can weigh all the diverse aspects of your condition and choose the treatment most likely to meet your needs.