



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Acute diarrhea is an abnormal increase in the liquidity and frequency of stools. This is a symptom, not a disease. Simple diarrhea is common among all age groups.

FREQUENT SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Cramping abdominal pain and bloating.
- Loose, watery, or unformed bowel movements.
- Lack of bowel control (sometimes).
- Fever and nausea (sometimes).

CAUSES

Either the intestines produce too much fluid or not enough fluid is absorbed from the intestines. There are many causes, including infections (viruses, bacteria, parasites).

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Viral gastroenteritis (stomach "flu").
- Food intolerance or lactose intolerance.
- Emotional upsets or stress.
- Food poisoning.
- Eating large amount of certain foods, such as prunes or beans.
- Children in daycare.
- Food allergy.
- Disease or tumor of the pancreas.
- Diverticulitis, appendicitis, or fecal impaction.
- Excess alcohol use.
- Use of drugs, such as laxatives, antacids, antibiotics, quinine, or anticancer drugs.
- Radiation treatments for cancer.
- Recent illness.
- Inflammatory bowel disease.
- Crowded or unsanitary living conditions.
- Weak immune system due to illness or drugs.
- Travel to foreign country.
- Drinking contaminated water.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wash hands often to prevent spread of germs, especially after using the bathroom.
- Avoid undercooked or raw seafood, buffet or picnic foods left out for several hours, and food served by street vendors.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

It goes away by itself and leaves no lasting effects. Most cases of diarrhea last a short time (24 to 48 hours) and a search for the cause may be unnecessary.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Dehydration if diarrhea is prolonged, especially in infants.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- In most cases, this disorder will be self-treated at home. Call your health care provider if symptoms are more severe or they cause you any concern.
- Your health care provider may do a physical exam. Medical tests may include studies of blood and stool.
- Treatment usually involves drinking plenty of fluids and rest as needed. There is no specific drug therapy.
- It is not necessary to keep persons with diarrhea away from others in the family or household. Try to avoid close contact if possible. Wash hands often.
- Hospital care may be needed, if dehydration is severe.

MEDICATIONS

- Drugs are usually not needed for treatment. If symptoms are severe or prolonged, adults may use drugs for nausea or diarrhea such as loperamide or Pepto-Bismol.
- Some infections may require specific drug treatment.
- If a drug you take is the cause of the problem, you may be advised to change drugs or stop taking the drug.

ACTIVITY

Get extra rest if needed. Have quick access to a toilet.

DIET

- For infants and children, replace lost fluids and electrolytes with products such as Pedialyte, Ceralyte, or Infalyte (follow product's directions). Infants require more frequent breast feedings or bottle feedings.
- Adults should drink fluids and take in salt in soups and salted crackers. Eat frequent, small meals.
- An age-appropriate, unrestricted diet is suggested. Eat complex carbohydrates, fresh fruits, lean meats, yogurt, and vegetables. Carbonated drinks or commercial juices with a high concentration of simple carbohydrates should be avoided.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- Diarrhea lasts more than 48 hours.
- Mucus, blood, or worms appear in the stool, or fever or severe pain develops in the abdomen or rectum.
- Dehydration develops. Signs include dry mouth, wrinkled skin, excess thirst, and little or no urination.

Special notes:

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