

Diarrhea

Brief Version

What is diarrhea?

Diarrhea can be caused by a virus or bacteria in your child's intestines. This makes your child's bowel movements (BMs) looser and come more often. Mild diarrhea is when your child has a few loose BMs. When the BMs are watery, the diarrhea is severe.

When your child has diarrhea, it is important to make sure your child does not lose too much water. If your child has these signs, he or she could be dehydrated:

- Dry, sticky mouth.
- No tears.
- No urine in over 8 hours (over 12 hours if more than 1 year old).
- Dark urine.

Taking care of the diarrhea can keep your child from losing too much water.

Taking Care of Watery (Severe) Diarrhea

If your baby is less than 1 year old and bottle-fed:

- Give him fluids more often than you would normally and as much as he wants. Fluids prevent dehydration.
- Give your baby Kao Lectrolyte or Pedialyte instead of formula for 4 to 6 hours.
- After 4 to 6 hours, give your baby formula again. You may need soy formulas if the diarrhea is severe or doesn't improve in 3 days.
- If your baby is over 4 months old, continue rice cereal, strained carrots, strained bananas, and mashed potatoes.

If your baby is less than 1 year old and breast-fed:

- Breast-feed more often.
- If your baby is over 4 months old, continue rice cereal, strained carrots, strained bananas, and mashed potatoes.
- Offer Kao Lectrolyte or Pedialyte between feedings only if your baby does not urinate as often as usual or has dark-colored urine.

If your child is over 1 year old:

- Give dried cereal, saltine crackers, yogurt, oatmeal, bread, noodles, mashed potatoes, carrots, applesauce, and strained bananas.
- Give water, diluted Kool-Aid or diluted Gatorade as the main fluids.
- Caution: If your child does not want to eat solid food, give your child milk or formula rather than water.

Taking Care of Mild Diarrhea

- Feed your child like always. (You can keep giving formula to your baby.)
- Stay away from all fruit juices.

Call your child's doctor right away if:

Diarrhea

- Your child has not urinated in 8 hours (12 hours for older children) or has a very dry mouth or no tears.
- There is any blood in the diarrhea.
- Your child has had more than 8 BMs in the last 8 hours.
- The diarrhea is watery AND your child also throws up repeatedly.
- Your child starts acting very sick.

Call your child's doctor during office hours if:

- There is mucus or pus in the BMs.
- Your child has a fever that lasts more than 3 days.
- The mild diarrhea lasts more than 2 weeks.
- You have other concerns or questions.

Written by B.D. Schmitt, M.D., author of "Your Child's Health," Bantam Books.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.