

Treating Diarrhea and Dehydration

Most children should continue to eat a normal diet including formula or milk while they have mild diarrhea. Breastfeeding should continue. If your baby seems bloated or gassy after drinking cow's milk or formula, call your pediatrician to discuss a temporary change in diet. Special fluids are not usually necessary for children with mild illness.

Children with moderate diarrhea can be cared for easily at home with close supervision, special fluids, and your pediatrician's advice. Your pediatrician will recommend the amount and length of time that special fluids should be used. Later, a normal diet can be resumed. Some children are not able to tolerate cow's milk when they have diarrhea and it may be temporarily removed from the diet by your pediatrician. Breastfeeding should continue.

Special fluids have been designed to replace water and salts lost during diarrhea. These are extremely helpful for the home management of mild to moderately severe illness. Do not try to prepare these special fluids yourself. It is too easy to get confused by some of these complex recipes. You could accidentally make a bad fluid for your baby. Use a fluid that is made by one of the reputable manufacturers. The three most widely available products that you will find in nearly every pharmacy are:

- Pedialyte (Ross Laboratories)
- Infalyte (Mead Johnson Nutritionals)
- ReVital (PTS Labs)

Other brands of special fluids are available and equally effective. Many drug stores have their own generic brands of special fluids. Ask the pharmacist for assistance.

If a child is not vomiting, these fluids can be used in very generous amounts until the child starts making normal amounts of urine again.

If your child develops severe diarrhea, he may require IV fluids in the emergency department for several hours to correct dehydration. Usually hospitalization is not necessary. Immediately seek your pediatrician's advice for the appropriate care if symptoms of severe illness occur.

While this illness runs its course, here are some general do's and don'ts that you should keep in mind:

DO

- Watch for signs of dehydration which occur when a child loses too much fluid and becomes dried out. Symptoms of dehydration include a decrease in urination, no tears when baby cries, high fever, dry mouth, weight loss, extreme thirst, listlessness, and sunken eyes.
- Keep your pediatrician informed if there is any significant change in how your child is behaving.
- Report if your child has blood in his stool.
- Report if your child develops a high fever (more than 102°F or 39°C).

- Continue to feed your child if she is not vomiting. You may have to give your child smaller amounts of food than normal or give your child foods that do not further upset his or her stomach.
- Use diarrhea replacement fluids that are specifically made for diarrhea if your child is thirsty.

DON'T

- Try to make special salt and fluid combinations at home unless your pediatrician instructs you and you have the proper instruments.
- Prevent the child from eating if she is hungry.
- Use boiled milk or other salty broth and soups.
- Use "anti-diarrhea" medicines unless prescribed by your pediatrician.