

Diarrhoea



What is it and how can I treat it?

Diarrhoea is loose or watery poo. It is usually nothing to worry about. A common reason for diarrhoea is infection of the gut (gastroenteritis). Many bacteria, viruses, and other 'germs' can cause diarrhoea. Sometimes they come from infected food or drinking infected water - hence the advice to drink bottled water when you are visiting some countries. You can also get diarrhoea from a virus that spreads from one person to another by close contact, or when an infected person prepares food for others.

Other causes of diarrhoea include anxiety, overindulging in some types of food and alcohol and an underlying medical condition.

In most cases, diarrhoea eases and goes within several days, but sometimes it takes longer. The biggest risk is dehydration so the main treatment is to have lots to drink, mainly water but include some diluted fruit juice and/or soup and try to eat as normally as possible. Small, light meals rich in carbohydrates - like bread, rice, pasta or potatoes are best to be eaten as soon as you feel like it and avoid fatty, spicy, or heavy food. Salty foods such as soup can help replace salt lost from your system.

If you are breastfeeding or bottle-feeding your child and they have diarrhoea, continue if they will still feed (use their normal-strength feed if they are bottle-fed). If you are worried that your baby or child may become dehydrated then you can give them rehydration drinks. Do not use homemade salt or sugar drinks. Speak to your pharmacist or telephone your GP surgery if you have any concerns.

Medication is not usually necessary but if you want to reduce the number of trips you have to make to the toilet then you can buy anti-diarrhoea treatments from your pharmacy, supermarket or store. These medicines are not suitable for children under the age of 12 and should not be taken if there is blood in your stools or if you have a high temperature.

You can prevent the spread of infection by washing your hands thoroughly when preparing food and after going to the toilet.

See a doctor if you suspect that you are dehydrating or if you still have diarrhoea after a week but have no other symptoms.

Visit www.nhs.uk for more information on diarrhoea.

If you would like a copy of this document in large print, Braille or on audio tape, or if you would like this information explained in another language please telephone 01707 369705.