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When your child has diarrhea

Diarrhea is a common childhood illness that usually lasts from three to seven days and then is over. Aside from the nuisance of frequent diaper changes and cleanups, the only real concern in diarrhea is that so much fluid (and the mineral salts dissolved in the fluid) is lost in the stools that the child may become dehydrated. Dehydration can have serious medical consequences, but it's relatively easy to prevent by making sure that a child who has diarrhea drinks enough of the right kind of liquids.

What should my child drink? GOOD choices are oral rehydration solutions such as Pedialyte and Infalyte, which you can buy without a prescription at the supermarket or drug store. These solutions contain water, sugar, and salt that your child needs. Don't substitute plain water for oral rehydration solutions; drinking nothing but water can be harmful, though children may drink small amounts of water in addition to the solution if they want to.

AVOID fluids that contain a lot of sugar such as soft drinks, undiluted juices, or fruit punch. These drinks can make diarrhea worse.

How much should my child drink? Children with diarrhea need at least twice as much fluid as they usually drink. Allow them to drink as much of the rehydration solution as they want. For the first four to six hours, a 1 year old child should drink at least four ounces an hour or one ounce every 15 minutes. Older children need a little more; younger children a little less. After that, let them drink whenever they want to.

Don't keep the child on the oral rehydration solution for more than a day. It is very important that your child return to a regular diet as soon as possible.

What if my child is vomiting? Give the rehydration solution in very small amounts, two to three teaspoons every five minutes, until the vomiting stops. Then slowly increase to the amounts suggested above.

Can a child with diarrhea continue to eat? Yes. Eating is very important for your child's health, and most children can eat throughout their diarrheal illness. Many children with mild diarrhea can simply continue their regular diet. An additional bottle or more frequent nursing may be sufficient to supply all of the fluid they need, or they may take supplements of oral rehydration solution. Your child may not want to eat at the beginning, but try to begin feeding again within 24 hours of the start of the diarrhea.

- If your child is nursing, continue to breastfeed.
- If your child is taking formula, continue with the same formula.
- If your child is eating solid foods, continue to give a regular diet.

GOOD choices are noodles, crackers, oatmeal, rice cereal, vegetables, fresh fruits (especially bananas), yogurt, and boiled meats.

AVOID foods with a lot of sugar (Jello, ice cream, sweetened cereals) and fried, fatty foods.

Don't worry if you see bits and pieces of food in your child's stools. Even though some of the food is not getting digested, your child is still getting needed calories and nutrients.

Does my child need medication? Most children with diarrhea get better without special medicines. Some of the diarrhea remedies you can buy without a prescription can actually be harmful to your child.

Please ask your doctor before you give your child any special medications. **The most important treatment for any child with diarrhea is fluids.**

When should I call the doctor? Call our office if:

- Your child is vomiting and cannot keep any fluids down
- Your child is less than 6 months old
- Your child has signs of dehydration, regardless of age:
 - Dry mouth
 - No tears when crying
 - Sunken eyes
 - Urinating less frequently
 - Unusually sleepy or fussy
- Your child has a severe stomachache
- The diarrhea has blood in it
- The diarrhea gets worse