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## Acute Diarrhea

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Diarrhea can either be *new onset* ("acute diarrhea"), or it could be a problem you have had recurrently for a long time (chronic diarrhea). This page is going to talk about the *new onset* type – in other words, the type of diarrhea people get when they get sick with a bug of some sort.

"Acute Diarrhea" means diarrhea that has just started, sometimes abruptly, and it only lasts *less than 2 weeks*.

### WHAT CAUSES ACUTE DIARRHEA?

The most common cause of new diarrhea is an infection. The most common cause for that infection is *VIRUS*. It is often associated with nausea, vomiting, and belly cramps. This type of infection usually just has to 'run its course' and let your body fight it off. It usually lasts 3-7 days, although may last up to two weeks in some cases.

Unfortunately, there is no special medication you can take to clear the virus faster. Antibiotics do not work on *viruses*, and in fact, they may only make the diarrhea worse!



**\*\*\* MOST OF THE TIME, YOU DO NOT NEED TO SEE A DOCTOR FOR DIARRHEA. IN FACT, YOU SHOULD USUALLY STAY HOME TO REST AND AVOID SPREADING THE GERMS TO OTHERS \*\*\***

In rare cases, the diarrhea can be caused by a *BACTERIA*, but that is usually associated with certain risk factors, which will be shown below.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR THE DIARRHEA?

Your body just needs time to fight off the virus. In the mean time, here are some things you can do:

- **Drink plenty of fluids** to prevent yourself from becoming dehydrated from all the fluids you are losing from diarrhea and/or vomiting.
- If you do not have any of the "reasons to see a doctor" listed below, then you can take over-the-counter **Imodium**. This slows down your bowel so that you don't have as much diarrhea. (Be careful not to take too much, though, or you can actually constipate yourself!)
- For nausea or vomiting, take over-the-counter **Gravol**.
- For belly cramps, you can take **anti-inflammatories** (i.e. **Advil**, Motrin, Aleve, Ibuprofen, Naproxen), as long as your doctor has not told you to avoid them for other reasons.
- You can also take **Tylenol** (a.k.a. **acetaminophen**) for pain, fever and muscle aches.

### THE REASONS YOU MAY NEED TO SEE A DOCTOR

- Recently taken antibiotics.
- Recently travelled outside of North America.
- Recently been hospitalized.
- May have eaten spoiled foods or water.
- Recent camping and drank water from the outdoors.

### REASONS TO DEFINITELY SEE YOUR DOCTOR

- Severe, watery diarrhea with signs of dehydration – such as, dry mouth and tongue, thirst, muscle cramps, very dark-colored urine, urinating infrequently, and dizziness or lightheadedness after sitting up. (*Note: if you are having these symptoms, you may need to go directly to ER for IV fluids instead of seeing your family doctor*).
- Severe belly pains.
- A fever that is very high or lasts longer than a day or two.
- Blood in the diarrhea or stool.
- If it lasts longer than 2 weeks.



- If you seem have recurrent diarrhea quite frequently over time.

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