Stewart Medicine | Dr. Adam Stewart









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Acute Diarrhea

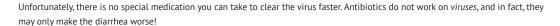
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Diarrhea can either be *new onset* ("acute diarrhea"), or it could be a problem you have had recurrently for a long time (chronic diarrhea). This page is going to talk about the *new onset* type – in other words, the type of diarrhea people get when 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, vomitting, and belly cramps. This type of infection usually just has to 'run it's course' and let your body fight it off. It usually lasts 3-7 days, although may last up to two weeks in some cases.





*** 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 vomitting.
- 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 vomitting, 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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