

Diarrhea

Call

Call the doctor if your child has diarrhea AND one of the following:

- Blood in the diarrhea.
- Severe stomach pain that comes and goes every few minutes or every hour. Your child may feel fine and act normally between episodes of pain.
- Your child is on antibiotics (for example, amoxicillin) currently or has been on antibiotics in the past 2 months.
- Any signs of dehydration.
- High fever (greater than 102.2° F) or a fever that lasts longer than two days. (See Fever section)
- Your child is less than 1 year old.
- Your child has traveled outside the United States in the past three months.
- Your child has played with reptiles (including pet turtles, iguanas, and lizards).
- Your child is tired or confused.

Remember, most practices have a doctor on call during the times the office isn't open. Call the office's main number for information.

Dehydration

Dehydration occurs when the body doesn't have enough water to function properly. A child's body can quickly lose a lot of water and salt through vomiting or diarrhea, especially if the child is not drinking enough because she does not feel well. Some signs that your child is becoming dehydrated are:

- Your child isn't peeing as often as usual (needs fewer diaper changes or trips to the bathroom).
- Your child's urine is a darker color than usual and has a strong smell.
- Your child's breathing and heartbeat are faster than normal (put the palm of your hand on your child's chest to feel the heartbeat).
- The soft spot on your baby's head is sunken in.
- Your child's mouth and tongue look dry or cracked.
- Your child is crying, but you do not see any tears.
- Your child is acting confused or doesn't know where he/she is. If your child has any of these signs of dehydration, call your child's doctor.

What can you do to take care of a child with diarrhea?

- **Diet:** Give your child a regular diet unless she is also vomiting (See Vomiting section for diet suggestions).
- Offer more foods containing starch: cereals, rice, breads, or noodles.
- Encourage your child to drink Pedialyte,[®] Gatorade,[®] water, or juices. You can also offer popsicles to keep your child from getting dehydrated.
- Avoid bean or milk products for a few days, if they make diarrhea worse.
- **Comfort:** Diarrhea burns the skin. Change your baby's diaper soon after each BM.
- Clean the baby's bottom with a gentle soap and water.
- Avoid baby wipes, which can burn skin that is already irritated by diarrhea.
- **Medication:** You should not give your child any medicine to stop the diarrhea until you have spoken to your child's doctor.
- **Prevention:** Make sure everyone in the household washes their hands thoroughly. Diarrhea is very contagious and easily spreads to other family members.

The Facts:

Your child's bowel movements (BMs, poops, stools) will probably vary in frequency and texture from day to day. It is normal to have an occasional "loose" stool. However, when a child experiences a sudden change from formed, solid stools to frequent, watery stools, this is diarrhea.

- Diarrhea is a common childhood problem.
- Diarrhea is often due to a viral stomach illness. It can occur with vomiting and a low-grade fever that typically lasts 3-6 days.
- It is important to monitor your child for signs of dehydration. Remember, children lose a lot of water and salt when they have diarrhea.
- It takes less time for younger children to become dehydrated than older children.