Diarrhea: Self-Care

Diarrhea is characterized by a significant increase in the frequency, or a significant decrease in the solidity of bowel movements. It has many causes—both infectious and non-infectious.

What should I do?

• If you have diarrhea with vomiting, give priority to settling your stomach before tending to the diarrhea. When these symptoms are happening at the same time, you should be especially aware of the risk of dehydration. If you can’t keep any liquids down and have not urinated for more than 8 hours, you should seek medical attention.

• If you have diarrhea without vomiting, you may not have to change your diet very much. You should drink plenty of fluids (water, sports drinks, or VERY diluted juices) to keep yourself hydrated. Stay away from greasy and spicy foods, full strength juices (the sugars make diarrhea worse), and other foods or drinks that you remember have made previous episodes of diarrhea worse.

Sticking to bland foods, such as the BRATS diet (described below) may also help:

- B ananas, bread (to help replace potassium)
- R ice, rice-based cereal
- A pples, applesauce (unlike apple juice, these have pectin which tends to thicken bowel movements)
- T oast (no butter, a small amount of jam or jelly is okay)
- S altines—other crackers (to help replace lost sodium)

What about diarrhea medicine?

There are non-prescription products, such as Imodium AD, Pepto-Bismol, and Kaopectate that can decrease the frequency or increase the consistency of bowel movements.

(over)
If you use this sort of preparation, always follow the package instructions. You can find these products at any pharmacy including the Gannett pharmacy.

(Note: some of these products can make stools dark black and cause the tongue to turn black. This is a normal response to the medication and not something to be concerned about).

Also, some studies have shown that taking Lactobacillus acidophilus (a normal intestinal bacteria) which may be found in the health food section of many stores can shorten the length of diarrheal illness.

**What if I still feel sick?**

Seek medical attention if the advice on this page is not helping you feel better, or if you have experienced any of the following:

- diarrhea for more than 5 days
- severe abdominal cramping
- a fever for more than 2 days
- not urinated in more than 8 hours
- seeing blood in the toilet
- recent international travel
- more than 5 episodes of diarrhea in a day

Call Gannett (255-5155) or another health care provider.