

## **Diarrhea in children (The Basics)**

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

**How often should my child have a bowel movement?** — It depends on how old he or she is:

- In the first week of life, most babies have 4 or more bowel movements each day. They are soft or liquid. It is normal for some babies to have 10 bowel movements in a day.
- In the first 3 months, some babies have 2 or more bowel movements each day. Others have just one each week.
- By age 2, most children have at least 1 bowel movement each day. They are soft but solid.
- Every child is different. Some have bowel movements after each meal. Others have bowel movements every other day.

**How do I know if my child has diarrhea?** — It depends on what's normal for your child:

- For babies, diarrhea means that bowel movements are happening more often than normal. Your baby might have twice as many bowel movements as he or she usually has. (In babies, normal bowel movements can be yellow, green or brown. They can also have things that look like seeds in them.)
- Older children with diarrhea will have three or more runny bowel movements in a day.

**What are the most common causes of diarrhea in children?** — The most common causes are:

- Viruses
- Stomach bugs
- Side effects from antibiotics

**What should my child eat and drink when he or she has diarrhea?** — Your child can continue to eat a normal diet. OK foods include:

- Lean meats
- Rice, potatoes, and bread
- Yogurt
- Fruits and vegetables
- Milk (unless the child has problems digesting milk)

**What foods and drinks should my child avoid?** — These foods might make diarrhea worse:

- Foods that are high in fat
- Apple, pear, and cherry juice
- Drinks with lots of sugar
- Sports drinks

**What can I do to treat my child's diarrhea?** — You can:

- Make sure he or she drinks enough water and other liquids.
- Avoid diarrhea medicines. They are not usually needed for children, and they may not be safe.

**When should I take my child to the doctor?** — You should take your child to the doctor if he or she:

- Has bloody diarrhea
- Is younger than 12 months and won't eat or drink anything for more than a few hours
- Has bad belly pain
- Is not acting like him or herself
- Is low in energy and does not respond to you
- Is dehydrated. Signs include:
  - Dry mouth
  - Thirst
  - No urine or wet diapers for 6 hours
  - No tears when crying