

DESCRIPTION

An abnormal increase in the liquidity and frequency of stools caused when either the intestines produce too much fluid or not enough fluid is absorbed from the intestines. This is a symptom, not a disease. Simple diarrhea is common among all age groups.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Cramping abdominal pain.
- Loose, watery or unformed bowel movements.
- Lack of bowel control (sometimes).
- Fever (sometimes).

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Viral gastroenteritis (stomach "flu").
- Food intolerance or lactose intolerance.
- Emotional upsets or stress.
- "Food poisoning".
- Diverticulitis, appendicitis, or fecal impaction.
- Excess alcohol use.
- Irritable bowel syndrome or inflammatory bowel disease.
- Weak immune system due to illness or drugs.
- Travel to foreign country.
- Drinking contaminated water.
- Use of medications, such as laxatives, antacids, antibiotics, quinine, or anticancer drugs.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wash hands often to prevent spread of germs, especially after using the bathroom.
- Avoid undercooked or raw seafood, buffet or picnic foods left out for several hours, and food served by street vendors.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

It goes away by itself and leaves no lasting effects. Most cases of diarrhea last a short time (24 to 48 hours) and a search for the cause may be unnecessary. Dehydration may occur if diarrhea is prolonged, especially in infants.

GENERAL MEASURES

- In most cases, this disorder will be self-treated at home.
- Your health care provider may do a physical exam. Medical tests may include studies of blood and stool.
- Treatment usually involves drinking plenty of fluids and rest as needed. There is no specific medication treatment.
- It is not necessary to keep persons with diarrhea away from others in the family or household. Try to avoid close contact if possible. Wash hands often.
- Hospital care may be needed, if dehydration is severe.

MEDICATIONS

- Medications are usually not needed for treatment. If symptoms are severe or prolonged, you may use antinauseant and antidiarrheal medicines such as loperamide or Pepto-Bismol.
- Some infections may require specific medication treatment.
- If a medication is the cause of the problem, you may be advised to change medications or stop taking the medication.

DIET

- Suck ice chips or drink small amounts of clear fluids often. Replace lost fluids and electrolytes with products such as Pedialyte or Ricelyte for infants and children, and diluted rehydration fluids (Gatorade) for adults.
- Once the symptoms improve, switch to a BRAT diet. (Bananas, Rice, Applesauce, dry Toast)
- Avoid spicy, high sugar and fatty foods for several days.
- No dairy, alcohol or caffeine until stools have been well-formed for at least 48 hours.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF

- Diarrhea lasts more than 48 hours or becomes worse.
- Mucus, blood, or worms appear in the stool.
- You develop new symptoms such as vomiting, fever or abdominal pain.
- Dehydration develops. Signs include dry mouth, wrinkled skin, excess thirst, and little or no urination.