

# Diarrhea: Self-Care

*Here are some general tips to help your body recover...*

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 to do

- ***If you have diarrhea WITH vomiting ...***

Settle 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.

***What can I eat?*** Once you've stopped vomiting for at least 6 hours and are holding down fluids, you should start out slowly by trying to eat bland foods such as the "BRATS" diet:

**B** ananas, bread (to help replace potassium)

**R** ice, rice-based cereal

**A** pples, applesauce (unlike apple juice, these have pectin which can also thicken bowel movements)

**T** oast (no butter, a small amount of jam/jelly is ok)

**S** altines—or other crackers (to help replace lost sodium)

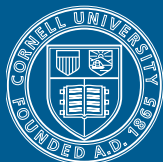
- ***If you have diarrhea WITHOUT vomiting ...***

You may not have to change your diet very much. Drink plenty of fluids (water, sports drinks, or very diluted juices) to keep hydrated. Stay away from

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greasy and spicy foods, full-strength juice (the sugars make diarrhea worse), and other foods or drinks that you remember have made previous episodes of diarrhea worse.

## 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.

If you use this sort of preparation, always follow the package instructions. You can find these products at any pharmacy including the Cornell Health 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 Cornell Health (607-255-5155) or another health care provider.