

Diarrhea in infants (under 4 months)

Give your baby oral electrolyte solution in the proper manner and you will keep your baby hydrated and the episode of diarrhea will pass. Although these instructions are simple, they were unknown even recently in some parts of the world. Over a million lives were saved when the World Health Organization promoted these “rehydration” instructions between 1990-95. Blessed with clean water supplies and good sanitation in the US we have “only” 300 deaths annually [no more than 40 of them from rotavirus], but that statistic would be lower if all parents had the information that follows here.



Large volume watery stools are easy for most parents to identify as diarrhea. If your baby is breast-fed, it is fine to keep nursing, just do it a little more frequently and make sure you aren't eating anything that might be upsetting your baby's stomach. Most diarrheas are caused by a virus and are easy to pass on to others from the stool. Be very careful to wash your hands and the hands of your baby before each feeding. That can be a challenge when your baby blasts the diarrhea thru the diaper and several layers of clothing!

Of course your baby will by now have a raw bottom. You can help prevent this by washing with (minimal) soap and water, maybe using Domeboro drying solution, rinse, then a thin layer of skin lotion.

Electrolyte solutions are fairly inexpensive and very important to use if the diarrhea is anything but minor. Pedialyte, Ricelyte, Equalyte are some that you can find in grocery or drug stores. If your baby is on formula, make sure to use only the electrolyte solution at first. And you need to give just small amounts at first. Don't just let your baby take the whole bottle of it. If you do, the stomach will immediately give everything back! By giving small frequent amounts you will have the most success in keeping fluids down. Even so, the solution is specially designed to bring balanced fluids into the body even if your baby vomits after a few minutes. We need to give small frequent amounts of the solution. For example:

Give one teaspoon (or 5 ml on a medication syringe) every 5 minutes. In a couple hours you can:

Give two teaspoons every 10 minutes. In a couple more hours you can:

Give one ounce every 15 minutes (that could be in the bottle). At this time a mother who is breast-feeding can alternate the electrolyte solution with a short time on the breast. A couple hours later you can:

Give 1 ½ ounces every 20 minutes... in a couple hours:

Give 2 ounces every ½ hour (are you exhausted yet??).

If the diarrhea has slowed down and there is no or very little vomiting you may go to hourly pedialyte feeds of a few ounces. Formula should wait till you are feeding a normal amount of electrolyte solution every 3 or 4 hours. Even then you should start the formula gradually. For instance try one ounce of formula followed by 3 ounces of electrolyte solution (or put the milk into the pedialyte). After a few feeds you can go to 2 ounces of formula and 2 ounces of electrolyte solution and so on until it is all formula. Some babies will not tolerate full strength formula for 3 days after an episode of bad diarrhea, so don't worry if you have to introduce the formula very slowly.



When should you worry? Well 1st of all, if you EVER have doubts about how you are doing, let us see or at least re-weigh your baby on our scales. Getting fluid into your baby faster than it leaves is our goal. After a while when the diarrhea slows down you should notice urine also on soiled diapers. Bring the baby in if:

No improvement after 3 days

Very watery or bloody stools

Persistent or severe vomiting

High fever (over 102°)

Unable to drink or decreased alertness

Sunken dry eyes, “doughy” skin or sunken soft spot

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