

Diarrhea in Toddlers / babies on solids

By giving your young child oral electrolyte solution in the proper manner you will keep them hydrated and the episode of diarrhea will pass. Although these instructions are simple, they saved over a million lives between 1990-95 when the World Health Organization promoted these “rehydration” instructions. 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.

Viruses cause most diarrheas and are easy to pass on to others from the stool. If your child is still nursing, keep nursing! Make sure you aren't eating anything that might be upsetting your child's stomach. Be careful to wash your hands and the hands of your child before each feed. That can be a challenge when your child blasts diarrhea thru several layers of clothing! If still in diapers, your baby will need some TLC for his/her bottom. You can help prevent a diaper rash by washing with just a little soap and water, maybe using Domeboro drying solution, rinsing with water, then using a thin layer of skin lotion.



Electrolyte solutions are fairly inexpensive and very important to use if the diarrhea is anything but minor. Pedialyte, Ricalyte, Equalyte are some. Older children may need extra flavoring with unsweetened kool-aid or crystal-light. In a pinch the older child can use a sport drink like Gatorade (never an energy drink!) But we need to limit intake, just sips at first. If your child is not cooperative, spoon feed him/her. The electrolyte solutions are designed to bring fluid into the body even if they vomit afterwards. Small frequent amounts of the solution will minimize vomiting and reduce stools. DO NOT use home remedies like soft drinks, tea or fruit drinks. As long as there is no fever, pepto-bismol can help settle the stomach. Use the chewable tablets or a teaspoon of the pink liquid!

So if the diarrhea is bad, for now give nothing else but the electrolyte solution as follows:

Give two teaspoons (or 10 ml on a medication syringe) every 5 minutes. In an hour or so you can:

Give one ounce every 10 minutes. In another hour or so you can:

Give 1 ½ ounces 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. Children who take solids can have something like crackers or toast or apple or banana. Just a small amount!! Another hour or so you can:

Give 2-3 ounces every 20 minutes...again, some solids are ok.... in a few hours:

Give 3-4 ounces every ½ hour (are you exhausted yet???)

If the diarrhea has slowed down and there is little vomiting you may go to hourly feeds of several ounces. Do not give any milk products yet (that aren't breast milk). You need to start the milk or milk-based formula gradually. It can take up to 3 days for the gut to re-grow the enzymes to digest milk. Yogurt seems to be a good transition food. Easy-to-digest foods like eggs, cereal, rice, clear soups, banana, toast, carrots or potatoes given in small amounts are good healing foods too. Apple is a healing food given in small amounts without the skin.

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 child on our scales. Avoiding dehydration is our goal. After a while when the diarrhea slows down you should notice better urine output. Be sure to bring your child back in (or to the emergency room) if:

- No improvement after 3 days
- Very watery or bloody stools
- Persistent or severe vomiting
- High fever (over 102.5° F)
- Unable to drink or decreased alertness /consciousness
- Sunken dry eyes, “doughy” skin or weight loss over 10%

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