

Diarrhea

Diarrhea is the discharge of watery, loose stools that occurs more frequently than normal bowel movements. It is your body's way of clearing out any viruses or bacteria and most often indicates a stomach or intestinal infection. Other causes of diarrhea include medications—especially antibiotics, food intolerance, stress, traveling, drinking untreated water, and irritable bowel syndrome. Diarrhea may be accompanied by abdominal cramps and nausea.

If you have diarrhea, you should drink only clear liquids until you begin to feel better, which may take up to 24 hours. Don't take anti-diarrheal drugs (such as Pepto Bismol) for the first 24 hours, since diarrhea may be helping you get rid of viruses or bacteria. After 24 hours, only use anti-diarrheal drugs if you have cramping but no other signs of illness, such as fever.

When you feel ready to eat, start with mild foods, such as dry toast, crackers, rice, bananas, or applesauce. Stay away from dairy products for three days and avoid spicy foods, apple juice, prune juice, alcohol, and drinks that contain caffeine until 48 hours after your symptoms have gone away.

You should call your doctor or other medical professional if any of the following situations occur:

- if your diarrhea is black or bloody
- if you get diarrhea after drinking untreated water
- if you have signs of dehydration, such as dry mouth and reduced urine output
- if abdominal pain increases or localizes, especially to the lower right or lower left part of the abdomen
- if you have severe diarrhea (large, loose bowel movements) every one to two hours, or if a child under four has severe diarrhea for longer than one day, or if an infant under six months has severe diarrhea for eight hours
- if mild diarrhea lasts for a week or two without a cause.

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For more health information ...

- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-33-ASK ME (1-800-332-7563). For TTY, the Healthphone number is 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit our Web site at www.members.kp.org
- Contact your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.

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