

DIARRHEA

Diarrhea is defined as three or more loose or watery stools per day. Nearly everyone will have an episode of diarrhea at some point during their life, with the average adult experiencing it four times per year. Although most cases of diarrhea resolve within a few days without treatment, it's important to seek expert consultation when symptoms persist or worsen.

DIARRHEA CAUSES

Diarrhea can be caused by a variety of other factors—

Food—Certain types of food can cause diarrhea. For spicy food lovers, diarrhea often occurs the following day due to spicy food containing a chemical ingredient called capsaicin. Most people are intolerant of dairy products and certain types of sugars. Large amounts of fatty food can cause diarrhea in some people, particularly patients who had their gallbladder removed. Food allergy can also cause diarrhea.

Chemical Laxatives—Magnesium containing antacids used to treat heartburn or upset stomach or magnesium supplements can cause diarrhea. Sorbet is an artificial sweetener that is used in sugar free gum and prepared foods such as has and jellies, which can cause diarrhea.

Prescription Drugs—Certain prescription drugs such as antibiotics and diabetes drug such as metformin can routinely cause diarrhea.

Infection—Bacterial, viral, fungal, parasitic infections can all lead to diarrhea.

Diseases—Many diseases can cause diarrhea such as inflammatory bowel diseases, cancer, chronic diabetes, hypothyroidism, Celiac sprue, small bowel bacterial overgrowth, previous abdominal/pelvic surgeries.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome—This is a common condition that occurs due to abnormal contractions of the intestines. Many times, hypersensitivity of nerve fibers is involved.

TREATMENT

Modification of the diet may help reduce symptoms. Anti-diarrhea medications can be tried in certain situations. Antibiotics can be considered when the cause of the diarrhea is due to infection. Treatment of the underlying disease is obviously important. Patients are encouraged to discuss their diarrhea symptoms with the experts at Comprehensive Digestive Institute of Nevada to receive the most appropriate management course.

PREVENTION

Hand washing — Hand washing is an effective way to prevent the spread of infection. Hands should ideally be wet with water and plain or antibacterial soap and rubbed together for 15 to 30 seconds. Pay special attention to the fingernails, between the fingers, and the wrists. Rinse the hands thoroughly and dry with a single use towel.

If a sink is not available, alcohol-based hand rubs are a good alternative for disinfecting hands. Spread the hand rub over the entire surface of hands, fingers, and wrists until dry. Hand rubs may be used several times. Hand rubs are available as a liquid or wipe in small, portable sizes that are easy to carry in a pocket or handbag. When a sink is available and the hands are dirty, wash them with soap and water.

Clean the hands after changing a diaper, before and after preparing food and eating, after going to the bathroom, after handling garbage or dirty laundry, after touching animals or pets, and after blowing the nose or sneezing.

DIARRHEA PREVENTION

Food safety — The following precautions have been recommended for all consumers by the Food Safety and Inspection Services (www.fsis.usda.gov) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- Do not drink raw (unpasteurized) milk or foods that contain unpasteurized milk.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Keep the refrigerator temperature at 40°F (4.4°C) or lower; the freezer at 0°F (-17.8°C) or lower.
- Use precooked, perishable, or ready-to-eat food as soon as possible.
- Keep raw meat, fish, and poultry separate from other food.
- Wash hands, knives, and cutting boards after handling uncooked food, including produce and raw meat, fish, or poultry.
- Thoroughly cook raw food from animal sources to a safe internal temperature: ground beef 160°F (71°C); chicken 170°F (77°C); turkey 180°F (82°C); pork 145°F (63°C) with a three minute rest time.
- Seafood should be cooked thoroughly to minimize the risk of food poisoning. Eating raw fish (eg, sushi) poses a risk for a variety of parasitic worms (in addition to the risks associated with organisms carried by food handlers). Freezing kills some, although not all, harmful microorganisms. Raw fish that is labeled "sushi-grade" or "sashimi-grade" has been frozen.
- Cook chicken eggs thoroughly, until the yolk is firm.
- Refrigerate foods promptly. Never leave cooked foods at room temperature for more than two hours (one hour if the room temperature is above 90°F/32°C).

Food safety for pregnant women or those with a weakened immune system — The following additional recommendations apply to pregnant women and those who have a weakened immune system:

- Do not eat hot dogs, pâtés, luncheon meats, bologna, or other delicatessen meats unless they are reheated until steaming hot; avoid the use of microwave ovens since uneven cooking may occur.
- Avoid spilling fluids from raw meat and hot dog packages on other foods, utensils, and food preparation surfaces. In addition, wash hands after handling hot dogs, luncheon meats, delicatessen meats, and raw meat, chicken, turkey, or seafood or their juices.
- Do not eat pre-prepared salads, such as ham salad, chicken salad, egg salad, tuna salad, or seafood salad.
- Do not eat soft cheeses such as feta, Brie, and Camembert, blue-veined cheeses, or Mexican-style cheeses, unless they have a label that clearly states that the cheese is made from pasteurized milk.
- Do not eat refrigerated pates or meat spreads. Canned or shelf-stable products may be eaten.
- Do not eat refrigerated smoked seafood unless it has been cooked.

SUMMARY

Diarrhea is a common problem. By working closely with an expert doctor, effective treatment is frequently available.