

SUNSHINE MEDICAL CLINIC
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WINTER TIME DIARRHEA

Diarrhea and vomiting along with low grade fever is a common winter time infectious disease that is caused by Rotavirus. This organism thrives in the cooler temperatures and the closer contact between people during the winter time promotes the contagious nature of this organism. Children tend to play more indoors during cool weather and share toys etc. which maybe another reason we see this illness so commonly in the winter months.

Infants and children will typically have 5-10 loose yellow-green watery stools a day. These do not have any blood in them. There may be small amounts of mucus mixed into the stool. There may be several episodes of vomiting, especially after feeding. The fever is usually low grade, 99-100 degrees F. If the patient is well hydrated they will still be active and have a good appetite for fluids at least. These symptoms last for 3-5 days and resolve spontaneously.

Dehydration is the main complication of this illness that leads to hospitalization. In the olden days Acute Gastroenteritis (this is the name of this disease) with dehydration was a major cause of severe illness and death in children. In the developing countries, this is still a major problem.

The signs and symptoms of dehydration should be known to every parent:

- The soft spot on an infant's head gets sunken
- The eyes are dry, so that no tears are made with crying
- The tongue is dry and coated
- The skin is dry and stays tented when pinched
- There is decreased alertness & the child may be excessively drowsy or disoriented -
 There is no desire to drink
- The urine output is decreased (normally a child should pass urine at least 5-6 times daily)

In case of any of the above signs always seek medical help right away.

To avoid this major complication of dehydration certain dietary changes need to be made early on. On the first day of diarrhea/or vomiting the diet should be changed to mostly clear liquids. The ideal fluids to consume are those which have a good balance of glucose and salts. These help in adequate absorption of water without causing salt imbalance. *Pedialyte, Ricelyte, Kap-lectrolyte* etc are freely available at drug and dept. stores. Sports drinks like *Gatorade* are **NOT** the best choice for treating diarrhea. Small amounts of these fluids should be offered every few minutes, as large volumes consumed at once will induce vomiting. Clear liquids by themselves should not be used for more than 24 hrs as this can worsen diarrhea. Early introduction of soft starchy foods during the course of Acute Gastroenteritis, has been shown to decrease the severity and length of illness. So on the second day offer foods like *mashed potatoes* (without butter), *bananas, cereal*,

soups, broths, bread, crackers, jell-o etc. If your child is hungry for food, these foods may be offered on day one also. Fruit juices which are sugary, milk, and dairy products like cheese should be avoided until diarrhea is resolved. This is because in this illness the gut loosens the capacity to absorb lactose which is the principal sugar in dairy products and milk. Yogurt on the other hand, is easily digested as the lactose in it has already been broken down by the active culture. Medications that stop the diarrhea like (*Kaopectate, Pepto-bismal, Imodium*) should not be used in children as there can be serious side effects such as bowel obstruction. Considering the illness resolves spontaneously in 3-5 days, this risk is not worth taking.

Isolation of the patient from others around them is important to prevent spread of this very contagious disease. Good hand washing after using the toilet and before eating should be seriously emphasized. The patient's cups, spoons, etc. should not be shared. Children should be kept out of daycare or school until the diarrhea/vomiting is resolved. A new vaccine for the prevention of Rotavirus gastroenteritis is being developed. When available, this will be given in the form of drops by mouth in the first few months of life.