



# Diarrhoea

## **What is diarrhoea?**

Normal stools are usually solid and most healthy people will open their bowels between three times per day and three times per week.

The term diarrhoea is used when stools are passed more than three times a day and when the stools become loose and watery.

Most people are affected by diarrhoea at some time in their lives. It is often accompanied by stomach pains, feeling sick and vomiting.

## **What causes diarrhoea?**

Diarrhoea is mainly caused by a bacteria or viruses and can be acute, short term or chronic, long term, lasting more than two to three weeks.

Diarrhoea can be caused by bacteria or viruses that have transmitted from person to person.

Diarrhoea occurs when the micro-organisms irritate the mucous membrane of the small or large intestine resulting in an abnormally large quantity of water in the motions. The irritated gut becomes very active, contracting excessively and irregularly, colic. This can be accompanied by nausea, vomiting and cold sweats. In some cases the motions may include some blood.

Food poisoning is another common form of acute diarrhoea, mostly caused by the bacteria *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*. These infections are passed on through contaminated food, such as poultry and eggs or water.

Travellers are susceptible to acute diarrhoea often due to contaminated water or less stringent hand hygiene by food handlers.

Acute diarrhoea can sometimes occur during or after a course of antibiotics, as a result of a variety of drugs and alcohol, and is also associated with attacks of acute anxiety.

In acute diarrhoea, symptoms come on suddenly but usually clear up within 5-10 days.

## **What are the symptoms associated with diarrhoea?**

- Frequent, watery motions
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea, vomiting
- Stomach pains
- Fever
- Dehydration

## **Chronic diarrhoea**

Chronic diarrhoea can be a symptom of many disorders such as:-

- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Acute, recurrent or chronic intestinal infections
- Inflammatory bowel disease ie: Ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease
- Laxatives
- Lactose intolerance
- Gluten intolerance

## **When should the doctor be consulted?**

- When the diarrhoea has lasted more than one to two weeks
- If there is blood in the stools and/or high temperature associated with diarrhoea
- If the cramping or abdominal pain becomes constant or severe

## **How can diarrhoea be treated?**

Diarrhoea can usually be treated safely at home and most episodes of acute diarrhoea will settle spontaneously without the need for medical treatment

If the episode is severe it is important to ensure that you take additional fluids and salts to replace those lost with the diarrhoea

Ready mixed rehydration sachets, like Dioralyte, can be bought from any pharmacy and added to your drink

Eat normally as soon as your appetite returns

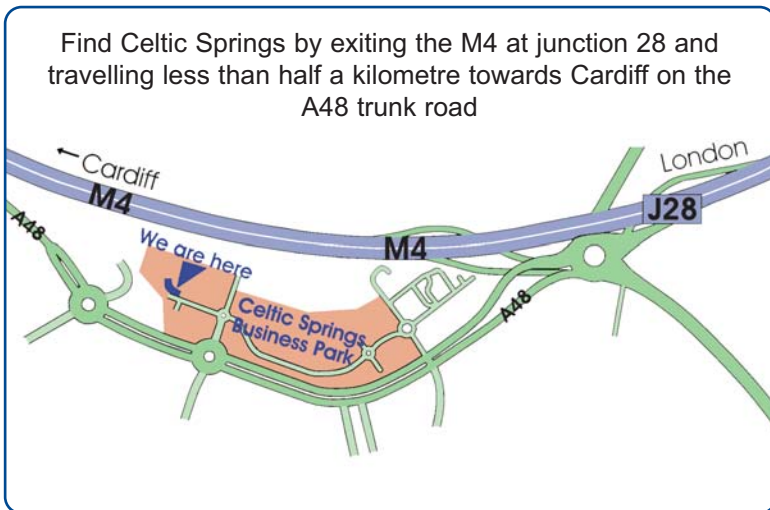
An anti-diarrhoeal drug such as Imodium is available from pharmacies

If diarrhoea persists consult your GP who will carry out further investigations.

For further information  
[www.corecharity.org.uk](http://www.corecharity.org.uk)

This fact sheet was designed to help you. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions of our specialists and nurses.

If you have any problems following your procedure call Nucleus Healthcare during opening hours  
08:00 hrs. — 18:00 hrs.



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