

Patient Info - Acute Diarrhoea in Adults

Diarrhoea is passing looser or more frequent stools than is normal for you. Most cases of diarrhoea clear up in a few days without treatment. However, diarrhoea can lead to dehydration, so you should drink plenty of fluids – small, frequent sips of water until it passes.

Some infections causing diarrhoea are easily picked up and passed on from person to person. To prevent the spread of these infections, you should always maintain high standards of hygiene.

To prevent diarrhoea you should always wash your hands:

- After you go to the toilet.
- Before you touch food.
- Between handling raw meat and food ready to be eaten. (There may be some germs (bacteria) on raw meat.)
- After gardening.
- After playing with pets (healthy animals can carry certain harmful bacteria).

You should also take extra measures when in countries of poor sanitation. For example, avoid water and other drinks that may not be safe and avoid food washed in unsafe water.

If you have sickness and or diarrhoea you should:

- Wash your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet. Ideally, use liquid soap in warm running water but any soap is better than none. Dry properly after washing.
- Don't share towels and flannels.
- Don't prepare or serve food for others.
- Regularly clean the toilets that you use. Wipe the flush handle, toilet seat, bathroom taps, surfaces and door handles with hot water and detergent at least once a day. Keep a cloth just for cleaning the toilet (or use a disposable one each time).
- Stay off work, college, etc, until at least 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or being sick (vomiting).
- **Food handlers:** if you work with food and develop diarrhoea or vomiting, you must immediately leave the food-handling area. For most, no other measures are needed, other than staying away from work until at least 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting. Some special situations may arise and sometimes longer time off is needed. Specialist advice may be needed for some uncommon causes of infectious diarrhoea. If in doubt, seek advice from your employer or GP.
- If you have had Gastroenteritis you should also avoid swimming pools for 2 weeks after the last episode of diarrhoea.

Further information is available from NHSinform – www.inform.scot