



Diarrhoea in Children

Diarrhoea is the most common symptom in children. It is often the first indication that a child is not well and causes a lot of concern for parents. As a country, we are at the tailed end of the largest cholera outbreak that affected many parts of the country.

What causes Diarrhoea?

Diarrhoea is often the first sign that something is not right in the gut. This may be caused by infection of the gut from taking contaminated food or water. A variety of organisms have been implicated as causes of diarrhoea including bacteria, viruses and parasites.

In children less than 5 years, viral infections are the commonest causes with Rotavirus being the commonest. Yes, you read right, Rota virus that you see on among the vaccinations on the under 5 card causes diarrhoea and hence the need for vaccination. Diarrhoea is also common when an infant is being introduced to solid feeds and among formula fed babies due to incorrect mixing of formula, improper storage and inadequate cleaning of bottles.

What to do when your child has diarrhoea at home

- Rehydrate: Give ORS as the child tolerates,
- Give additional fluids such as breastmilk if the child is still breastfeeding
- Allow intake of water but encourage more intake of ORS
- AVOID giving juices as they worsen the diarrhoea
- Take the child to the hospital if child has more than 3 episodes of diarrhoea in 1 day or is passing large volumes of watery diarrhoea
- Hygiene: go over your routine and see where you may have food or water contamination and correct it



How is diarrhoea treated at the hospital?

ORS remains the mainstay of treatment of diarrhoea. As most episodes of diarrhoea are caused by self-limited viruses, antibiotics are not routinely given for diarrhoea unless the doctor suspects a bacterial cause of the diarrhoea.

Fluids through a drip line may be given for a child who is not able to take orally due to vomiting but are not the mainstay of treatment. Zinc supplementation is often given especially to children less than 5 years as it has been shown to improve outcomes.

How to prevent diarrhoea

- Wash hands before preparing meals, before eating and after using the toilet
- Treat or boil your water to ensure you are taking clean water
- Ensure you do not introduce other feeds to a breastfeeding child before the appropriate age of 6 months
- For formula fed babies, ensure you follow instructions for preparation and storage of milk
- Clean and sterilize bottles, plates and cups used to feed children
- Ensure proper storage of food avoid leaving food open for flies
- Ensure food is adequately cooked and heat food before serving food that was stored
- Do not keep food for too long in the fridge as this may still go bad
- Ensure your appropriate clean vegetables that will be served fresh
- Ensure a safe environment for growing children, they will always want to explore