

HEALTH TOPICS

Diarrhea

Overview

- Diarrhea is a change in the stool pattern from formed or solid bowel movements to ones that are looser or watery in consistency and generally occurring more than three times a day.
- Most acute diarrhea episodes last only a few days to a couple of weeks and generally need no special treatment.
- Acute diarrhea can be caused by viruses, bacteria, parasites, intolerance to certain foods or as a side effect of medications.
- Chronic diarrhea may be due to intestinal diseases such as Crohn's disease or Ulcerative Colitis or Celiac disease. It can also be associated with functional bowel disorders such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome.
- Diarrhea from any cause is dangerous if a person becomes dehydrated.

Signs & Symptoms

- Diarrhea may be accompanied by a sense of urgency to defecate, abdominal cramping, pain or bloating, nausea and vomiting.
- Depending on the cause of diarrhea, a person may have a fever and/or some blood and mucous in their stools.

Prevention

- To prevent infectious diarrhea, practicing good hygiene such as washing hands often, especially before eating or preparing food; and always after using the toilet.
 - Keep your hands/fingers away from the mouth area. Food to be eaten should be properly cooked and any leftovers stored properly in the refrigerator.
 - To prevent Traveler's Diarrhea: avoid potentially contaminated water and foods
- Treatment
- The most important treatment for all causes of diarrhea involves maintenance of fluid and electrolyte (salts and minerals) balance.
 - Specific guidelines on maintaining adequate fluid and electrolyte balance to prevent dehydration can be obtained from SHS or online.
 - Depending on the cause of the diarrhea, certain medications to slow down the diarrhea or to treat a specific infection may be needed.
 - More severe symptoms like vomiting for more than 2 days, diarrhea more than 6 - 8 times per day, blood in stools, weakness, painful cramping and/or fever over 101F should be evaluated by a clinician.
 - Instructions for a [food progression](#)

How We Can Help

- If you would like to be seen by our medical staff, you can book an appointment [online](#) or by calling our Appointment Desk to [schedule an appointment](#).
- Also, our [Advice Nurse](#) service is free for all UCSB students to discuss health concerns and the options for medical care.
- [Over the counter \(OTC\) products](#) to manage diarrhea are available for purchase at our Pharmacy, which is located in the lobby of UCSB Student Health Service.

Recommended Resources

- [Diarrhea](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/diarrhea/basics/definition/con-20014025) (Mayo Clinic) <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/diarrhea/basics/definition/con-20014025>
- [Diarrhea](http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/digestive-diseases-diarrhea) (WebMD) <http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/digestive-diseases-diarrhea>
- [Traveler's Diarrhea](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/travelers-diarrhea) (Centers of Disease Control & Prevention) <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/travelers-diarrhea>