



Feeding the Sick Child

When your child is sick with fever, diarrhea or throwing up, it's important to treat the symptoms quickly to prevent dehydration and get back to a healthy diet as soon as possible.

Your child should get better if given lots of rest, liquids and good foods. A child who is throwing up or has diarrhea can lose lots of water and salts from his or her body. If this water and salt is not replaced by drinking the right liquids, your child becomes dry. This is called dehydration. Dehydration can be life threatening, especially for infants and young children.



Signs of Dehydration

In infants (one week of age or older), look for less than four wet diapers in 24 hours. In young children, watch for less pee and urine that is a deep, yellow colour. Other signs of dehydration include a dry mouth or tongue, few or no tears when crying, sunken eyes and listlessness or lack of energy.

If your child has any of these signs, go to your family doctor or hospital right away.

A special liquid called an oral electrolyte maintenance solution (OEMS) helps replace the water and salts, and prevents dehydration. These special drinks have exactly the right amount of water, sugar and salts. These drinks come in different forms and you can buy them in most drug stores. They include:

- Drinks such as Pedialyte.
- Freezies such as Pediapops.
- A powder that you must mix with water such as Gastrolyte. You must mix this powder exactly as shown on the package. Using too much or too little water may harm your child.

Sports drinks are not recommended

TIP: Keep a supply of Oral Electrolyte Maintenance Solutions in your home.

If Your Child Has Diarrhea...

If your child has diarrhea due to a virus, it is important to replace the water and salts lost with an oral electrolyte maintenance solution. Generally two to four ounces (60-125 ml) of OEMS is given after each watery or loose stool. **There is no reason to stop feeding your child when he or she has diarrhea.** Continue feeding your baby on demand. For older children, offer age-appropriate foods every three to four hours. Give your child small amounts of food that your child likes. Starchy foods such as bread, cereals, pasta and rice, and fresh fruits and vegetables are the best foods to give your child when they have diarrhea.

Do not give foods or drinks that have a lot of sugar, fat or caffeine. High-sugar drinks like apple juice, Kool-Aid and soft drinks can make your child's diarrhea worse. Drinks with caffeine like coffee, tea or colas take water out of the body increasing dehydration. High-fat foods take longer to break down and digest, which can irritate the stomach, causing more cramps, bloating and diarrhea. Continue to give your child the OEMS along with food until the diarrhea has stopped.

Foods NOT to Feed Your Child

Grape juice, apple juice, orange juice, soft drinks like ginger ale, sports drinks like Gatorade™.

Ice cream, sherbet or Jell-O.

Sweetened cereals.

Fatty food such as french fries, hamburgers, hot dogs, and butter.

Spicy foods.

Foods to Feed Your Child

Milk.

Starchy foods, such as rice, potatoes, noodles, toast, and crackers.

Cereals such as rice or wheat cereal, and oatmeal.

Boiled or baked meat, fish and chicken, soya, and hard cooked eggs.

Vegetables with no added butter.

Fresh fruit such as bananas or canned fruit packed in juice or water.

Yogurt.

If Your Child Is Throwing Up...

In young infants, continue to feed on demand. In older infants and children do not feed your child solid foods until he/she stops throwing up. You may have to offer smaller amounts of liquids more frequently.

In place of food, offer small sips of an oral electrolyte maintenance solution (OEMS). These liquids not only help prevent dehydration, but are also less likely than solid foods to cause further vomiting. Start with a teaspoon (5 ml) of OEMS every few minutes from a spoon, syringe, or cup. When small sips stay down, slowly increase the amount of liquid you give your child to two to three tablespoons (30-45 ml) every five to 10 minutes. When this is kept down for a few hours, increase the amount to two to four ounces (60-125 ml) at a time. Giving your child too much to drink too soon may cause her or him to continue throwing up.

OEMS are low in calories, protein and other nutrients, and they should not be used alone for more than 24 hours.

Once your child stops throwing up and can keep liquids down, give foods slowly along with lots of fluids. Wait for your child to say she or he is hungry. Start with dry toast or a cracker. With a younger child, give bland, starchy foods like potatoes and rice until you are sure he or she is feeling better.

If Your Child Has a Fever...

Give your child lots of clear liquids to drink like water or fruit juice mixed with water. Do not feed your child fatty foods like french fries, hot dogs or butter. A fever decreases the activity of the stomach making fatty foods more difficult to digest. There is no reason to stop giving your child the milk he or she normally drinks.

Know When Your Child Is Not Getting Better...

- Shows any of the following signs:
 - ✓ No pee in eight hours.
 - ✓ Dry mouth.
 - ✓ Sunken eyes.
 - ✓ Extreme thirst.
 - ✓ No tears when crying.
 - ✓ Unusually drowsy or fussy.

If Your Child Has a Cold...

Sometimes a child with a cold will not be as hungry. Offer smaller servings of healthy foods that your child likes to eat. Offer plenty of liquids such as water and milk. Make sure your child gets lots of rest. Choose foods from the four food groups of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. Here are some suggestions:

Grain Products

- Toast.
- Crackers.
- Plain oatmeal.
- Pasta and rice.
- Unsweetened cereal.

Vegetables and Fruit

- Applesauce.
- Bananas.
- Canned fruit packed in water or juice.
- Mashed potatoes.
- Popsicles made from pureed fruit.

Milk Products

- Cheese slices.
- Milk-based pudding.
- Yogurt.

Meat and Alternatives

- Hard-boiled egg.
- Lean beef, pork, chicken or fish.

Combination Dishes

- Homemade chicken noodle soup.
- Homemade vegetable soup.
- Macaroni and cheese.

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