

Let's Talk...

Diarrhoea



What is diarrhoea and what causes it?

Diarrhoea is the frequent passing of loose, watery poo. It usually lasts for a few days.

Diarrhoea is something most of us will have experienced before, whether it's due to a common virus or infection, because of something we ate or drank, a side effect of medication you've taken, or something else. This is called acute diarrhoea, and it usually clears up within 5 to 7 days. It can come on quickly, leaving you rushing to find the nearest toilet.

Diarrhoea is something many of us will have experienced before and perhaps felt embarrassed about at the time. With much taboo still surrounding our poo, we understand why you might have felt this way but we're here to flush away the stigma surrounding diarrhoea. Why? Because the more you know about diarrhoea, the easier it is to understand when it might be something more serious.



How should I treat

diarrhoea?

If you're experiencing acute diarrhoea, it can usually be managed at home with plenty of rest.

Rehydration

Make sure you are drinking plenty of extra fluids and salts. You need them to replace those lost in the diarrhoea. The best choices are:

- Mineral water
- Salty soups

Some people are more sensitive to fluid loss, including babies, young children and older people. For these groups, it's a good idea to use pre-prepared oral rehydration solution. This can be bought over the counter in most pharmacies.

Medicine

Anti-diarrhoea medicine is available from pharmacies, and you don't need a prescription to buy it. It's often helpful in the early stages of diarrhoea, as it can reduce how often you need to poo. Talk to your pharmacist for advice on what might work best for you.

Food

There's no need to stop eating if you're experiencing diarrhoea, but you might prefer to have eat less if you're in the early stages of an illness. Have fluids with starchy carbs like rice, pasta or crackers. This can help the fluid and salt to absorb into the body. It might also help to avoid dairy, alcohol and spicy foods until you're able to tolerate them again.



How can I avoid diarrhoea?

One of the best ways to avoid acute diarrhoea is by washing your hands. Especially after using the toilet and before eating.

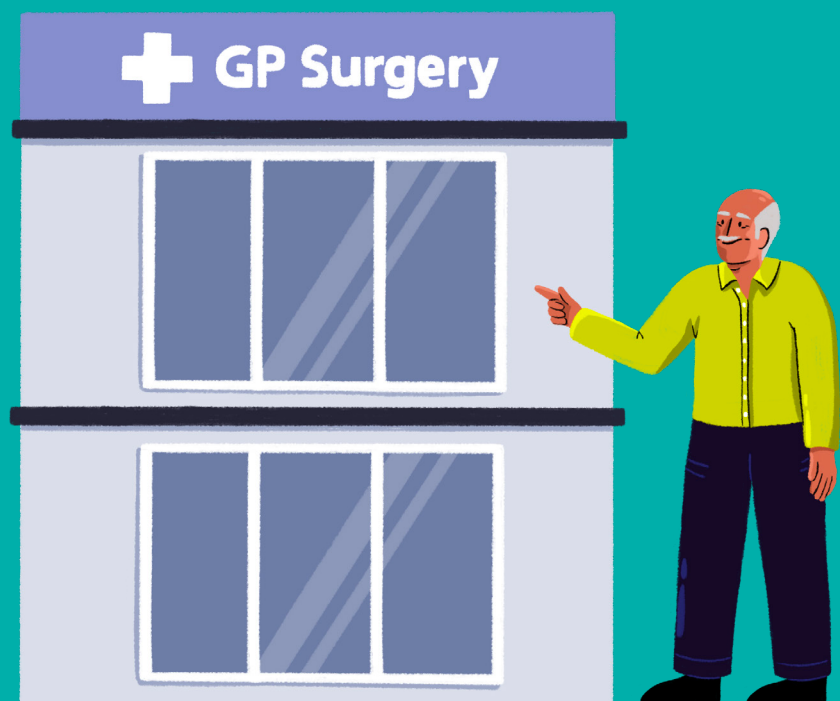
Many causes of acute diarrhoea are due to a bowel infection, often caused by contaminated food or water.

Norovirus causes diarrhoea and occurs in sudden local outbreaks. It's important not to spread the infection, so during that time, avoid visiting hospitals, schools, unwell relatives or the homes of older people.

When should I seek medical advice?

If you've experienced diarrhoea for more than 7 days, you should seek medical advice. You should also seek medical advice from your doctor or NHS 111 if any of these apply:

- If you notice blood in the diarrhoea.
- If you develop a high fever.
- If you are also experiencing cramping and belly pain that becomes very bad or constant.
- If you are still dehydrated after increasing your fluid intake or using rehydration sachets.



How do I tell someone I have diarrhoea?

Telling your doctor

Your doctor is no stranger to talking about digestive symptoms like diarrhoea, so try not to worry or feel embarrassed talking about it with them. Be honest with them about how long you've experienced it, if you've had any other symptoms, and importantly, if it's having a significant impact on your daily life. They need all the facts so that they can provide the right care and treatment.

Telling your employer

You should tell your employer if you're experiencing diarrhoea and if it's affecting your work or if it might impact others, for example if you're working with vulnerable people or handling food. If your diarrhoea is a symptom of a digestive condition, you might want to share your diagnosis with your employer or let them know you're undergoing tests. They might be able to offer support and adjustments.

Telling your family and friends

If you're experiencing diarrhoea, whatever the cause, you can tell people about it. If you're feeling embarrassed about it, you're not alone. It's a common feeling many people have about diarrhoea but remember, it's very likely that the person you're talking to will have experienced it before too. Telling others what you need can help them better support you.

How do I know what's normal for me?

Checking your poo regularly is important because it helps you to get to know your normal, and spot when something isn't quite right. The number of times we poo and what that poo looks like will be different for everyone but generally, your poo is an indicator of your health.

For more information about diarrhoea, including causes, diagnosis, treatment and support, go to gutscharity.org.uk/symptoms/diarrhoea.

Our online Poo-Torial tool can help you to better understand your digestive health by looking at the colour, consistency and frequency of your poo. Go to gutscharity.org.uk/poo-torial to try it now.



Guts UK is the national charity for the digestive system. We provide information and support on more than 40 digestive conditions and symptoms, as well as health and lifestyle. Go to gutscharity.org.uk/information to find out more. Need support? Contact our Helpline on **0300 102 4887** or gutscharity.org.uk/helpline.

Please note, this information is intended for people without a diagnosed digestive condition. If you live with a digestive condition and need information and support for diarrhoea, please speak to your healthcare team.

