

South Warwickshire



NHS Foundation Trust

Warwickshire Dietetic Service

**Dietary Management
of Toddler Diarrhoea**

This leaflet is intended as information for parents or carers of young children who suffer from 'toddler diarrhoea'. The child will be otherwise well, growing and gaining weight.

This leaflet can be issued to patients by Doctors, Nurses and Allied Health Professionals.

Dietary Management of Toddler Diarrhoea

What is 'toddler diarrhoea'?

- Toddler diarrhoea is the most frequent cause of chronic (persistent) diarrhoea in children between the ages of 1 and 5. It is more common in boys.
- Symptoms include 3 or more watery, loose stools daily, over a period of at least 3 weeks, in a child who is otherwise well and thriving. The stools are generally more foul-smelling than usual and often undigested foodstuffs are visible (particularly vegetables such as peas, sweetcorn and carrots).
- If there is any concern regarding growth, it would be advisable to see your GP, who will be able to do any necessary investigations or refer your child on to relevant health professionals.
- Your GP may also wish to rule out other causes of diarrhoea such as infection or lactose intolerance and a stool sample may be requested.

What causes toddler diarrhoea?

The causes of toddler diarrhoea are not completely clear. It may be due to some or all of the following factors:

- Fast transit time (ie when food moves quickly through the gut)
 - Young children sometimes have immature guts and often experience rapid gut transit time. Their bodies may not be able to digest certain foods as effectively as older children or adults.
- Dietary issues: "The 4 F's"
 - Fat
 - Fluid
 - Fruit Juices
 - Fibre

How is toddler diarrhoea treated?

Most cases of toddler diarrhoea will settle on their own, usually between the ages of 2 and 5 years of age. Often no treatment is needed, particularly if symptoms are mild, However, some temporary dietary changes may help, particularly if symptoms are more severe.

Dietary Management of Toddler Diarrhoea

Dietary Advice

Fat

- Low fat diets may contribute to toddler diarrhoea.
- Fat slows digestion and the speed at which food passes through the gut. Eating more fat may help to stop the diarrhoea.
- For children under five, healthy eating guidelines are not as strict as those which apply to adults. Try giving your toddler more foods containing fat. Aim to provide 35-40% of daily energy from fat (approx. 40g of fat daily from a range of foods)
- Suggested foods to include:
 - Dairy products e.g. full fat milk, yoghurts, cheese, custard, rice pudding.
 - Snack foods e.g. crackers, scones, pancakes or crumpets with margarine or butter, plain cake or biscuits, breadsticks or vegetables with creamy dips.
 - Meat products: chicken, lamb, beef, minced meat, sausages, burgers.
 - Add fat to starchy food e.g. bread with margarine or butter, potato mashed with margarine or butter, pasta with cheese sauce. You may wish to choose monounsaturated or polyunsaturated margarines such as those made from olive, rapeseed, sunflower and corn oils as these are healthier fats.

Fluid

- Young children's digestive systems struggle to cope with large fluid intakes, which can lead to an increase of fluid in the large bowel. Even a slight increase of fluid in the large bowel can cause stools to become more frequent and looser than before.
- Avoid excessive fluid intake. A toddler is not likely to need more than 6-8 cups (200ml size) of fluid each day.
- Where possible, offer your child water or milk to drink.

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Fruit Juices

- Fruit drinks such as pure fruit juice and squash should be limited as they often contain high levels of fructose (natural fruit sugars). Absorption of fructose is poor in young children. When these drinks are digested, the release of fructose promotes faster stomach emptying and quicker gut transit which can worsen toddler diarrhoea.
- Drinks which are classed as “no added sugar” may be sweetened with artificial sweeteners such as sorbitol. These should also be limited as they can have a similar effect as fruit juices.
- If giving pure fruit juice or fruit smoothie, ensure this has been well diluted (1 part juice to 10 parts water is recommended for young children). The quantity should be limited to one small beaker, glass of diluted juice or smoothie per day. Clear juices such as apple, grape and blueberry juices should be avoided altogether as these have high levels of indigestible sugars.

Note: Although fresh, tinned and frozen fruit also contains natural fructose, the digestion of this fructose is slowed by the presence of fibre. It does not usually have the same effect as fruit juice, in causing loose stools, unless eaten in large quantities.

Fibre

- Fibre is important to keep your gut healthy.
- Having a very high fibre or low fibre intake can make toddler diarrhoea worse.
- Fibre can help to soak up excess fluid in the large bowel, so if your child has a **low fibre diet** this process does not happen effectively and loose stools can occur. If your child currently has a very low fibre diet, try the following:
 - Change from white bread and low fibre cereals to wholemeal or wholegrain products e.g. wholemeal or seeded bread, Shredded wheat, Weetabix or Shreddies, brown rice or pasta.
 - Include more fruit and vegetables.
- If a child has a **high fibre diet**, the effect of large amounts of fibre passing through the gut causes irritation and can trigger loose stools. If your child eats a lot of high fibre foods, try the following:
 - Give your child lower fibre foods such as white bread, white rice, white pasta, low fibre breakfast cereals e.g. Cornflakes or Rice Krispies as a temporary measure.
 - If your child eats a lot of fruit and vegetable portions these could also be reduced as a temporary measure. Remember that a child’s portion of fruit or vegetable is what fits in the palm of their hand.

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Once the diarrhoea has settled

Your toddler needs a healthy diet, so some of these suggestions should only be used for a short time to help settle toddler diarrhoea, with a view to returning to a healthy, balanced diet when the symptoms resolve.

Whilst changes such as reducing sugary drinks and increasing fruit and vegetable intake can help improve the balance of the diet and could be encouraged on an ongoing basis, other changes such as increase in fatty foods and reduction in foods containing fibre can be relaxed once the diarrhoea has resolved. You should gradually give fewer fatty foods and more foods containing fibre including wholemeal bread, high fibre cereals, fruit and vegetables.

If symptoms recur, you may need to implement the changes for a longer period of time. Children under the age of 5 years are recommended by the Department of Health to have a vitamin supplement containing vitamins A, C and D on a daily basis. This should help to address shortfalls linked with reduced intake of fruit and vegetables. If your child's diet is limited in other areas, an age-appropriate multivitamin and mineral supplement may be useful. This will ensure they meet their requirements for micronutrients.

Equality Statement

At South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust we are fully committed to equality and diversity, both as an employer and as a service provider. We have a policy statement in our Equality Strategy that clearly outlines our commitment to equality for service users, patients and staff:

You and your family have the right to be treated fairly and be routinely involved in decisions about your treatment and care. You can expect to be treated with dignity and respect. You will not be discriminated against on any grounds including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

You have a responsibility to treat other service users, patients and our staff with dignity and respect.

Our information for patients can also be made available in other languages, Braille, audio tape, disc or in large print.

PALS

We offer a Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS). This is a confidential service for families to help with any questions or concerns about local health services.

You can contact the service by the direct telephone line on 01926 600 054 by email:

Pals@swft.nhs.uk or by calling in person to the PALS Office which is located in the Lakin Road Entrance to the hospital.

If you have any queries about your diet, please contact us:

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