

Chronic Diarrhea



What is chronic diarrhea?

Diarrhea is an increase in the number of stools per day and/or more loose or liquid stools. When diarrhea lasts for more than four weeks, it is called “chronic”.

What causes chronic diarrhea?

There are many causes of chronic diarrhea. Some exist in healthy people, but others are diseases that need long term medical care. These are some of the causes:

- ◆ Infections with bacteria or parasites
- ◆ Irritable bowel syndrome, which is due to more rapid colon action that sometimes follows an infection
- ◆ Toddler’s diarrhea, which is also from more rapid colon action and is often worsened by excessive juice
- ◆ Milk and soy allergies in infants
- ◆ Leakage of loose stool around constipated stool that is stuck in the rectum
- ◆ Intolerance of lactose (from milk) or fructose (from fruit juice)
- ◆ Inflammatory bowel disease, such as Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis
- ◆ Celiac disease, which is damage to the small intestine from wheat protein

How does the doctor determine the cause of my child’s diarrhea?

Your description of the problem combined with your child’s age provides the doctor with important information. The doctor may ask you some of these questions: How long has the diarrhea been going on? What do the stools look like? Is there blood in them? Does your child stool in the middle of the night? Does your child have any other symptoms, like fever, pain or poor weight gain? What does your child eat and drink? Has your child been on antibiotics? Does anyone else in the family have similar complaints?

Your doctor will also perform a physical exam on your child. However, more information may still be needed to determine the cause of the diarrhea. Some tests that might be ordered include stool studies to look for infection, blood tests, and endoscopy.

How is chronic diarrhea treated?

The treatment of your child’s diarrhea depends on the cause. Some conditions require only a change in diet, and others require medication. Children who have lost a significant amount of weight may need to have special attention paid to their nutrition. Your doctor will work with you to determine the best treatment for your child’s diarrhea.

For more information or to locate a pediatric gastroenterologist in your area please visit our website at: www.naspgan.org

IMPORTANT REMINDER: This information from the North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (NASPGHAN) is intended only to provide general information and not as a definitive basis for diagnosis or treatment in any particular case. It is very important that you consult your doctor about your specific condition.



SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS :