

# Diarrhoea



This is the frequent passing of watery, loose stools. It can be caused by a bacterial or viral infection or some disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or the effect of many prescribed drugs.

## Symptoms include:

- Cramps and abdominal pain
- Loose watery stools
- Vomiting
- Headaches



## Red flag symptoms

- Symptoms of moderate to severe dehydration such as-
  - drowsiness or confusion
  - passing little urine
  - dry mouth and tongue
  - sunken eyes
  - weakness
  - cool hands or feet
  - sunken fontanelle (soft spots in the head) in babies/young infants
- Symptoms that persist for more than a few days (or shorter in the elderly and small children)



## Self-care advice

- Drink plenty of water if possible to prevent dehydration
- Eat as normally as possible. Ideally include fruit juices and soups, which will provide sugar and salt, and also foods that are high in carbohydrate, such as bread, pasta, potatoes, or rice. There is no need to avoid solid food for 24 hours
- Always wash your hands after going to the toilet (or changing nappies). Regular cleaning of the toilet, including the flush handle and toilet seat is advisable
- Oral rehydration therapy to prevent dehydration can be taken after each loose stool.
- Loperamide can be used in adults and children over 12 to help reduce the duration and improve symptoms.



## Onward referrals

- Continuous loose watery stools for more than 72 hours or intermittent diarrhoea over more than 7 days
- Suspected side effect of a prescribed medication



## Signposting

- Pharmacy First Scotland – oral rehydration sachets
- Common Ailment Service Wales – oral rehydration sachets/loperamide

The information provided is correct at the time of publication, any information provided should be under the supervision of the Responsible Pharmacist. We hold no responsibility for any decisions made using this information.

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