

# Summer Diarrhoea-Common Gastrointestinal Ailment

**Distinct seasonal patterns of diarrhoea occur in many geographical areas. In temperate climates, bacterial diarrhea occur more frequently during the warm season, whereas viral diarrhoea, particularly diarrhoea caused by rotavirus peak during the winter. Every person has a susceptibility to certain diseases. People with more susceptibility to gastric infections are more likely to get diarrhea when exposed to pathogens that cause diarrhoea.**

## Introduction

Many communicable diseases which include diarrhoeal diseases are endemic in the country.<sup>1</sup>

It is a documented fact that diarrhoeal diseases form major public health problem in children under 5 years of age, especially in developing countries. In India, presently the diarrhoeal morbidity stands at 1.07 million cases and mortality stands at 2040 in these children<sup>2</sup>

Distinct seasonal patterns of diarrhoea occur in many geographical areas. In temperate climates, bacterial diarrhoea occur more frequently during the warm season, whereas viral diarrhoea, particularly diarrhoea caused by rotavirus peak during the winter. In tropical area, rotavirus diarrhea occurs throughout the year, increasing in frequency during the drier, cool months, whereas bacterial diarrheas peak during the warmer, rainy season. The incidence of persistent diarrhea follows the same seasonal patterns as that of acute watery diarrhea.<sup>6</sup>

## Causes

**1. Route of spread:** The infectious

agents that cause diarrhea are usually spread by the faecal-oral route, which includes the ingestion of faecally contaminated water or food, and direct contact with infected faeces.<sup>6</sup>

2. Following behavior patterns / habits increase the risk to diarrhea

**i. Failing to breast-feed exclusively for the first 4-6 months** of life lowers immunity and increases risk of developing severe diarrhea. Risk of diarrhea is many times greater in infants who are not breast-fed than in those who are exclusively breast-fed; the risk of death from diarrhea is also substantially greater.

**ii. Using infant feeding bottles** - These easily become contaminated with faecal bacteria and are difficult to clean. This increases risk of contamination.

**iii. Storing cooked food at room temperature** - When food is cooked and then

saved to be used later, it may easily be contaminated, for example, by contact with contaminated surfaces or containers.

**iv. Using drinking-water contaminated with faecal bacteria** - Water may be contaminated at its source or during storage in the home. Contamination in the home may occur when the storage container is not covered, or when a contaminated hand comes into contact with the water while collecting it from the container.

**v. Failing to wash hands properly after defecation**, after disposing of faeces or before handling food.

3. Host Factors:

Many host factors are associated with increased incidence, severity, or duration of diarrhea.

**i. Failing to breast-feed until at least 2 years of age:** Breast milk contains antibodies that protect against certain types of diarrheal disease, such as shigellosis and cholera.

- ii. **Malnutrition:** The severity, duration, and risk of death from diarrhea are increased in malnourished children, especially those with severe malnutrition. .
- iii. **Measles:** Diarrhea and dysentery are more frequent or severe in children with measles or who have had measles in the previous 4 weeks. This presumably results from immunological impairment caused by measles.
- iv. **Immunodeficiency or immune suppression:** This may be temporary, e.g. after certain viral infections (e.g. measles), or it may be prolonged, as in people with acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). When immune suppression is severe, diarrhea can be caused by unusual pathogens and may also be prolonged.
- v. **Immunity of a person:** People will lower immunity catch the infections more easily than people with good immunity.
- vi. **Susceptibility:** According

to homeopathy concept, every person has a susceptibility to certain diseases. People with more susceptibility to gastric infections are more likely to get diarrhea when exposed to pathogens that cause diarrhea. With rightly given homeopathic medicines immunity is increased and susceptibilities to diseases which a person is prone are decreased and hence patient's tendency to catch those infections is also reduced.

### Symptoms

1. Frequent and Loose watery stools.
2. In some instances, mucosal adherence is associated with changes in the gut epithelium that may reduce its absorptive capacity or cause fluid secretion (here usually bacteria is the cause e.g. E.coli.) <sup>6</sup>
3. Watery stools: this happens due to toxin secretion by some bacteria.
4. Enterotoxigenic E. coli, V: cholera and some other bacteria produce toxins that alter epithelial cell function. These toxins

reduce the absorption of sodium by the villi and may increase the secretion of chloride in the crypts, causing secretion of water and electrolytes. Recovery occurs when the affected cells are replaced by healthy ones after 2-4 days.<sup>6</sup>

5. Blood in stools due to mucosal invasion: E. coli and Salmonella can cause bloody diarrhoea by invading and destroying mucosal epithelial cells.

### Diagnosis

The clinical assessment consists of taking a brief history and examining the patient. Its objectives are:

- To detect dehydration, if present,
- Determine its degree of severity
- To diagnose dysentery, if present;
- To diagnose persistent diarrhoea, if present,
- To evaluate feeding practices in children and determine the child's nutritional status, especially to detect severe malnutrition;
- To diagnose any concurrent illness; to determine the cause

**Tests:** Stool test can be done to evaluate the causative organism if diarrhoea doesn't settle in 2-3 days based on treatment given based on clinical presentation.

### Diet recommended

#### Non-alcoholic beverages



Drink at least 1.5 liters of fluid, preferably low-energy drinks in the form of water, mineral water, unsweetened fruit or herbal teas or diluted fruit and vegetable juices. Moderate consumption of coffee, black tea (3-4 cups) and other caffeinated beverages should be reduced.<sup>7</sup>

## Vegetables, legumes and fruits



Eat five servings of vegetables, legumes and fruits every day. The ideal would be to eat three servings of vegetables and/or legumes and two servings of fruit (one serving = one clenched fist). Eat vegetables partly raw and consider seasonal and regional availability when selecting fruits and vegetables.<sup>7</sup>

## Cereals and potatoes



Eat four servings of grains, breads, pasta, rice or potatoes a day (five servings for active athletes and children). Prefer wholegrain products.<sup>7</sup>

## Milk and dairy products



Reduce the quantity of milk consumption and take only what is necessary especially needed sometimes for infants and children. Adults can avoid if other choices are available. Limit to 2-3 servings of milk and dairy products every day. Switch to low-fat versions.<sup>7</sup>



### Fats and oils



Consume 1–2 tablespoons of vegetable oils, nuts or seeds daily. High-quality vegetable oils (like olive, canola, walnut, soybean, flax, sesame, corn, sunflower, pumpkin seed and grape seed oil), as well as nuts and seeds, contain valuable fatty acids and can be consumed every day in moderate amounts (1–2 tablespoons). Use baking and frying fats such as butter, margarine or lard and high-fat dairy products such as whipped cream, sour cream and crème fraîche sparingly.<sup>7</sup>

### Processed foods high in fat, sugar and salt



Some processed foods (such as sweets, pastries, fast food products, snacks and soft drinks) are high in fat, sugar and salt and are less desirable nutritionally. They should be consumed sparingly – a maximum of one small serving a day. Try to use herbs and spices instead of salt. Avoid highly salted foods such as pickled vegetables, salted nuts, sauces, etc.<sup>7</sup>

## Treatment and Management

Routine determination of the etiology of diarrhoea in a laboratory is not practical, and the clinical aspects of the illness do not permit a specific etiological diagnosis to be made with confidence. The treatment of patients with diarrhoea must therefore be based on the major features of the disease and an understanding of the underlying pathogenetic mechanisms.<sup>6</sup>

The main principles of treatment are as follows:

1. Watery diarrhoea requires replacement of fluids and electrolytes- irrespective of its cause. ORS and Electrol should be given to patients and in case

of unavailability a solution of water with salt and sugar can also be given.

2. Feeding should be continued during all types of diarrhoea to the greatest extent possible, and should be increased during convalescence so as to avoid any adverse effect on nutritional status.<sup>6 s</sup>
3. Antimicrobials and antiparasitic agents should not be used routinely; most episodes, including severe diarrhoea and diarrhoea with fever, do not benefit from such treatment. The exceptions are: dysentery, which should be treated with an antimicrobial effective for Shigella; the few patients who do not respond to this

treatment should be studied further or treated for possible amoebiasis: suspected cholera with severe dehydration; - persistent diarrhoea, when trophozoites or cysts of Giardia or trophozoites of E. histolytica are seen in faeces or intestinal fluid, or when pathogenic enteric bacteria are identified by stool culture.<sup>6</sup>

4. Diarrhoeal diseases can be treated effectively by homeopathic remedies. The treatment can be based on symptoms and presentation of case. Few recommendations are given below with symptoms, however its best to take in consultation with your registered homeopathic practitioner.

### Medicines recommended:

#### Aloes Socotrina



Gastroenteritis - When Aloes is indicated, the diarrhoea is always associated with flatulence, and the patients have incontinence of the bowel when passing flatus or passing urine.”Diarrhoea, pain, and soreness, and burning in the rectum; stools copious and watery, with much flatus; great exhaustion and faintness after stool; every morning is driven out of bed for stool.”

#### Arsenic Album



It is indicated in acute gastritis when there are pains, thirst, restlessness, and diarrhoea. Very offensive, with persistent coldness; dysenteric; white, involuntary; burning; chronic, watery and painful.

#### Nux Vomica



The diarrhoea consists of frequent small stools, with backache and a feeling as if more were to be evacuated. Ineffectual urge for stools and vomiting “constant urging.” Accompanied by nausea.

## Colocynth



A good remedy for colitis accompanied by severe colic and diarrhoea.<sup>3</sup>

Before stools - Difficulty of retaining the stool Cutting colic Great urging.<sup>4</sup>

During stool - Tensive pain in the forehead Cutting colic. Burning in anus Violent pains in bowels, extending down thighs Compressive, griping pains, beginning at navel and passing down to rectum Much flatus.<sup>4</sup>

After stool - Cessation of colic or, more rarely, the colic occurs chiefly, and is very severe after stool, Weakness, paleness and great prostration <sup>4</sup>

## Veratrum Album



Nausea, with violent and profuse vomiting, usually associated with diarrhea. Vomiting of food, of green mucus, with cold sweat.

## Bryonia



It is used to relieve constipation, upset stomach, and fluid retention.

This is helpful for diarrhea during flu (especially when the person feels grumpy and wants to lie still and be left alone). It may also be helpful for diarrhea that occurs when a person gets overheated, and then drinks a lot of cold water. Symptoms often are worse in the morning. The person's mouth may be very dry.



## Pulsatilla



If diarrhea occurs after eating rich and fatty foods, this remedy can be helpful. Queasiness and abdominal pain are likely to occur, and the diarrhea has a changeable appearance. The person usually is not be thirsty, feels worse from being warm or in a stuffy room, and is better in open air.

## Podophyllum



This relieves watery diarrhea with cramping pain. The diarrhea occurs most often in the morning, and is often caused by excessive eating of fresh fruits. Also a useful remedy for painless diarrhoea and diarrhoea during dentition.

## References

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