

Diarrhea

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Diarrhea is abnormally frequent and watery bowel movements. It is one of the most common bodily disturbances. Diarrhea may be a mild symptom of some more serious condition, such as tumor of the bowel (intestine), or may be the chief symptom of an infection in the bowel caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites. In addition, diarrhea may be caused by improperly prepared or spoiled foods, by contaminated water, by certain chemicals, by irritation or inflammation of the lining of the intestines, or be generalized diseases that do not involve the bowel primarily (Stone, et al. 112-113).

Diarrhea varies from a slight inconvenience lasting a day or two to a grave illness. The most severe form of diarrhea is found in persons suffering from cholera. Consequences of diarrhea are loss of electrolytes, such as sodium and potassium; dehydration; and, in severe cases, heart failure. Diarrhea is a leading cause of death in infants. Treatment of diarrhea is directed towards eliminating the cause, when the cause is known. Drugs such as paregoric may be used to decrease the irritability of the bowel.

The patient may be given extra fluid, injected directly into his veins (Wolfe 34-36), to make up for fluids lost through the bowel. Furthermore, diseases of the digestive system are essentially of two types, infections and intoxications. An infection occurs when a pathogen enters the gastrointestinal (GI) tract and multiplies. Microorganisms can penetrate into the intestinal mucosa and grow there or can pass through to other systematic organs.

Infections are characterized by a delay in the appearance of gastrointestinal disturbance while the pathogen increases in numbers or effects invaded

tissue (Wolfe 34-36). There is also usually a fever, one of the body's general responses to an infective organism. Some pathogens cause disease by elaborating toxins that affect the GI tract. Intoxication is caused by ingestions of such a preformed toxin. Most intoxications, such as that caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*, are characterized by a very sudden appearance (usually in only a few hours) of symptoms of a GI disturbance.

Fever is less often one of the symptoms (Stone, et al. 112-113). Both infections and intoxications often cause diarrhea, which most of us have experienced. Severe diarrhea, accompanied by blood or mucus, is called dysentery. Both types of digestive system diseases are also frequently accompanied by abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting (see <http://digestive-disorders.health-cares.net/diarrhea.php>). The general term gastroenteritis is applied to diseases causing inflammation of the stomach and intestinal mucosa (Stone, et al. 112-113).

Botulism is a special case of intoxication because the ingestion of the preformed toxin affects the nervous system rather than the GI tract. In the developing countries, diarrhea is a major factor in infant mortality. Approximately one in every ten children dies of it before the age of five. It also affects the absorption of nutrients from their food and adversely affects the growth of the survivors. The cause of diarrhea may be any of several organisms.

Most are not identified, but surveys in such countries as Bangladesh indicate that the three most common causes are enterotoxigenic *E. coli*, *Shigella* spp., and intestinal rotaviruses. It is estimated that mortality from childhood diarrhea could be halved by oral rehydration therapy (Stone, <https://assignbuster.com/diarrhea/>

et al. 112-113). Ideally, this is a solution of sodium chloride, potassium chloride, and sodium bicarbonate. However, even a solution of a handful of table sugar and a pinch of salt in a liter of water has proved to be a very useful treatment for diarrheal diseases.

Reference:

What is diarrhea? Health-cares. net your fitness guides. <http://digestive-disorders.health-cares.net/diarrhea.php>

Stone, J., et al. (1999). Clinical gerontological nursing, pp. 112-113 (3rd edition) Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders.

Wolfe, M (Ed.) 2000. Therapy of digestive disorders. Pp. 34-36. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders.