

23. HOW TO TREAT DIARRHEA AT HOME--INCREASED FLUIDS & FOODS

These rules are from the WHO. They were originally written for children as they are at much greater risk of dying from dehydration due to diarrhea than adults, however the same treatment principles apply to adults. Following the guidelines is very important and is often life saving. **There are now four rules for treating diarrhea at home (A new rule “Give supplemental zinc” has recently been added):**

RULE #1: Give the Child More Fluids than Usual to Prevent Dehydration:

1) Use recommended home fluids:

-Next to Breast Milk, ORS solution is the best for all ages. Purified plain water is also good and may be used for all ages, however plain water does not replace the salts that are lost in the stool. You see that the ORS is being given with a cup and spoon. Never use baby bottles. Baby bottles are very difficult to keep clean and can contain deadly germs.

-For Children over 6 months old, you may, in addition, use food-based fluids that the child has had before. What fluids to give: Many countries have designated recommended home fluids. Wherever possible, these should include at least one fluid that normally contains salt (see below). Plain clean water should also be given.

Unsuitable fluids: A few fluids are potentially dangerous and should be avoided during diarrhea. Some examples are: Commercial soda and other carbonated beverages, Commercial fruit juices, Sweetened tea, Coffee, Some medicinal teas or infusions.

Suitable fluids: Most fluids that a child normally takes can be used. It is helpful to divide suitable fluids into two groups:

A. Fluids that normally contain salt, such as: ORS solution, salted drinks (e.g. salted rice water or a salted yoghurt drink), vegetable or chicken soup with salt.

B. Fluids that do not contain salt, such as: Plain safe water, Water in which a cereal has been cooked (e.g. unsalted rice water), Unsalted soup, Yoghurt drinks without salt, Green coconut water. Weak tea (unsweetened), Unsweetened fresh fruit juice.

2) Give as much of these fluids as the child will take.

3) Continue giving more of these fluids until the diarrhea stops.

RULE #2: Give supplemental zinc (Up to 6 months of age: 10mg every day for 14 days. Six months or more: 20mg every day for 14 days.) Zinc can be given as a syrup or as dispersible tablets, whichever formulation is available and affordable. By giving zinc as soon as diarrhoea starts, the duration and severity of the episode as well as the risk of dehydration will be reduced. By continuing zinc supplementation for 10 to 14 days, the zinc lost during diarrhoea is fully replaced and the risk of the child having new episodes of diarrhoea in the following 2 to 3 months is reduced.

RULE #3: Give the Child Plenty of Food to Prevent Undernutrition.

1) Increase the frequency of breast-feeding. Breast feeding is always what is most important both for prevention and treatment of diarrhea. If the child is not breast-fed, give the usual milk in a cup. However, if the cows milk seems to make the diarrhea worse, you may have to temporarily change to a lactose free formula such as soy.

2) If the child is six months or older you may continue to give the following foods, if the child has had them before:

-cereal or another starchy food mixed, with milk or pulses (peas, beans, lentils, and similar plants having pods), vegetables, meat, fish or egg.

-give fresh fruit or mashed banana or green coconut water to provide potassium.

-give freshly prepared foods; cook and mash or grind food well to help digestion.

3) Encourage the child to eat: offer food at least 6 times a day.). Frequent, small feedings are tolerated better than less frequent, large ones.

4) Give the same food after diarrhea stops, and give an extra meal each day for two weeks.

5) While the person is having diarrhea: Your body needs some sugar and ORS contains exactly the right amount. However, do not give foods high in sugars (Sodas and sweetened drinks such as tea, coffee which also contain stimulants or other drinks or to which sugar has been added)--These draw water into the intestine and make the diarrhea worse. (With diarrhea, you also have to be careful with commercial fruit juices. For nearly all other illnesses fruit juices are excellent. However, commercial fruit juices also contain added sugars which can make the diarrhea worse.)

RULE #4: See next section and illustration (#24).