

## APPENDIX 10: Management of Gastroenteritis – General Advice for Patients and Carers

(Courtesy of *safefood*)

Diarrhoea is a common problem, which affects most people at some point in their lives. Most cases are mild and clear up on their own, but if the diarrhoea lasts for more than a day or two you should ask your doctor for advice.

### **Good hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of diarrhoea.**

This includes frequent hand washing with soap and water, disinfection of toilet handle and seat, and disposal of soiled items. Do not share towels or face washers. Do not prepare food for others.

### **Remember to drink lots of fluid**

Dehydration is the commonest problem with diarrhoea and it is important to drink plenty of fluids. The best advice is 'small amounts often' to make vomiting less likely. Water, or diluted fruit juice, are best. Strong sugary drinks or sports drinks should be avoided. Rehydration drinks are ideal as they have the right balance of salts and sugars.

### **Only use medication when advised by your GP or pharmacist**

Drugs to stop the diarrhoea can be helpful but can also have side effects. They should not be given to children under 12 or given to anyone with blood in the diarrhoea. Antibiotics are not appropriate for most cases of diarrhoea. Only take medicine when advised by a health professional.

### **Tell your doctor if you are not better 3-4 days after your visit, or are getting worse**

Diarrhoea usually settles quickly. If the vomiting and diarrhoea do not settle over 3-4 days, or you feel you are getting worse, with dehydration, bloody diarrhoea, or abdominal pain, it is important to see your GP again. This is especially important for young children and the elderly.

### **Avoid fatty or spicy foods for a day or two, but otherwise eat as able**

The old advice to stop eating has changed and you should continue to eat normally, or whenever you feel ready. Plain foods are best, like rice, bread and pasta. It is probably best to avoid fatty or spicy foods until the diarrhoea settles.

### **Stay away from school or work until the diarrhoea stops**

It is very important to stay away from crèche, school or work until your symptoms resolve and ideally for 48 hours afterwards. This is particularly important for those at high risk of spreading the infection to others, like people who work with ready to eat food, medical, nursing staff and those who work as carers and children under the age of five.