

Preventing and Treating Travellers' Diarrhea

Boil it, cook it, peel it, or leave it!

- Always wash your hands before preparing or eating food. It is also important to wash your hands after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or having contact with animals or sick people.
 - › Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. It's a good idea to bring some with you when you travel.
- Only eat foods that are well-cooked and served hot. Avoid foods served at room temperature. Avoid raw or undercooked (rare) meats and fish, including shellfish.
- Only eat fruits and vegetables if you have washed them in safe water or peeled them yourself. Avoid salads and other items made with fresh produce.
- Avoid food from street vendors.
- Drink water only if it has been boiled or disinfected, or if it is in a commercially-sealed bottle. Use only ice made from purified or disinfected water.
- Commercially-sealed beverages in cans or bottles that are served unopened (such as carbonated drinks) and drinks made with boiled water and served steaming hot (such as coffee and tea) are generally safe.
- Brush your teeth with purified or bottled water.
- Avoid unpasteurized dairy products and fruit juices.

Swimming and bathing

- Water may look clean but could still be polluted or contaminated. You can get sick if you inhale (breathe in) or swallow water while bathing, showering, or swimming.
- Try to avoid getting water in your mouth or nose when swimming or doing activities in freshwater (e.g., streams, canals, lakes), or pools or hot tubs which may not be properly treated.

Monitor your health

- Seek medical care if you have bloody diarrhea, high fever, ongoing vomiting (throwing up), severe (very bad) abdominal (belly) pain, a lot of sweating, or signs of dehydration (not enough fluids). In some cases, diarrhea may be a sign of another infection (e.g., malaria). It is important to see a health care provider to talk about your symptoms, and to remember to tell them where you have been travelling or living.
- Seek medical care immediately if your baby or young child develops signs of dehydration, bloody diarrhea, fever, or ongoing vomiting.

Water treatment methods

There are several ways travellers can treat water to make sure it is safe to drink.

Boiling water is the best method to make water safe to drink. Water should be brought to a rolling boil for 1 minute. Other methods include using chemical disinfectants, portable water filtration devices, or ultraviolet light. Health Canada gives further details about how to disinfect water: <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/food-water>. These tips apply to anywhere you need to treat water, including camping trips.

Talk about options for prevention and treatment of travellers' diarrhea with your health care provider before you travel. Some doctors will order an antibiotic to take with you for treatment, if needed. The type of antibiotic depends on your destination.

Getting hydrated again

Oral rehydration solutions (ORS) are used to treat dehydration caused by diarrhea. Unlike other fluids, the ratio of the ingredients in an ORS matches what the body needs to recover from a diarrheal illness. You can get a package of ORS packets at a pharmacy before your trip to take with you. It is essential to drink extra fluids as soon as diarrhea starts.

- Most healthy adults with uncomplicated travellers' diarrhea can stay hydrated without an ORS by drinking purified water, clear soups, diluted juices, or sports drinks. Although it may not be necessary, healthy adults with mild diarrhea can also use an ORS.
- Dehydration from diarrhea is more of a concern in children, people with underlying medical conditions, and elderly people. An ORS should be considered for these people. Drink fluids at a rate to satisfy your thirst and keep your urine (pee) light-coloured. Instructions for preparing the ORS and how much to drink should be followed carefully.
- Babies should continue to get breast milk or their usual formula **and** an ORS. Children who are no longer nursing and adults should continue to eat solid food **and** an ORS.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeinated or sugary drinks like coffee, energy drinks, pop, sweetened fruit juices, and tea. Alcohol and caffeine can make dehydration worse, and sugary drinks can make diarrhea worse.

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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