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Treating Intestinal Illnesses

Note: This information is not intended to replace a physician/patient contact. It is for general purposes only

When a person first catches a virus or bacteria, a quick and efficient immune response is needed to fight off the infection. Depending on how well the body mounts this response, a person can get sick, or they can recover quickly with minimal symptoms. All of the supplements that are listed on the handout entitled “On the First Signs of Illness” should be implemented if the patient can keep them down. Be careful with the high doses of vitamin C though, as it can worsen a diarrheal illness.

Dehydration is the most important thing to avoid with any intestinal illness. Most fluids that are used for hydration are not ideal when treating an intestinal illness, as there must be a proper balance between water, salt, and sugar for these nutrients to be absorbed into the bloodstream. Signs of dehydration include decreased urine output, darker colored urine, no tears when crying, and dryness to the mouth.

When a person is having vomiting, their thirst mechanisms will make them want to drink large amounts of fluids to “catch up”. Often, if allowed to do so, the fluid will come back up. If so, it is very important to permit only 1-2 sips every 5 minutes for the first 30 minutes until it is established that the small fluid volumes are tolerated. Then one can SLOWLY increase the amount consumed in 5-minute intervals.

- If a child is breastfeeding, breast milk is the ideal rehydration solution. Besides having the perfect balance of nutrients, the antibodies that are in breast milk can help fight off the infection

- Fluids such as Pedialyte are superior to products such as Gatorade, as there is more sugar in the “sports drinks” than there should be for ideal rehydration. The sports drinks are a better option than juice or water.

-A simple recipe for making an oral rehydration solution is as follows:

- In 1 liter of water, add 2 level tablespoons of sugar or honey, one-fourth teaspoon of table salt (NaCl) and one-fourth teaspoon of baking soda (bicarbonate of soda).

- If baking soda is not available, use another quarter teaspoon of salt instead.
- If available, add one half cup of orange juice, coconut water, or a mashed ripe banana to the drink.
- Boiling the water first with chamomile can bring added benefit (see below)

Over the course of the next few days of having an intestinal illness, dairy products and especially milk, can make diarrhea worse. That is because digestive enzymes can be lost and the body may not be able to break down lactose. If you notice that drinking milk makes the stools loose again, avoiding dairy product for a week or more would be advisable.

Supplements for Treating Intestinal Illnesses

Probiotics – Probiotics provide beneficial bacteria (flora). The large intestine has billions of beneficial bacteria, but these can be lost during a bout of diarrhea. Studies have shown that using probiotics during an intestinal illness can reduce the length of diarrhea by 50%. The product that has been most studied is Culturelle (lactobacillus GG). This product is not guaranteed to be casein free (many probiotics are grown on milk sugar) so it should be avoided if on a strict casein free diet. Factor -1 from Klaire Labs and Pro Culture Gold from Kirkman Labs are very similar to Culturelle and are casein free. If these products are not available, see one that “high potency”, as the amount of “live bacteria” is important. The 3 listed products has about 20 billion organisms per capsule. Probiotics should be continued for 2-3 days after the stool normalizes. For children under 6 months of age, give 5 billion organisms twice a day. For children 6 months to 2 years give 10 billion organisms twice a day. For children 2-5 years old give 20 billion organisms twice a day. For children 5-10 years old give 30 billion twice a day, and for those over 10 years old, including adults, use 40 billion organisms twice a day. Probiotics are very powerful, and it is advisable to give ¼ to ½ the full dose the first time to make sure it is tolerated.

Colostrum – Colostrum is the first milk produced after a birth. It is high in antibodies that help fight infections and has healing and growth factors that aid in recovery. Kirkman Labs has Colostrum that is casein free. The dose is 1 tsp 3 times a day.

Chamomile/Sleepytime Tea – (Note: There is some cross-reactivity between Chamomile and Ragweed, so if there is concern about allergies to Ragweed, this should be tested ahead of time)

Chamomile is very calming for the intestinal system. It can help with reflux, nausea, vomiting, motion sickness, and almost all types of abdominal pain. It is available as a single tea bag, or as a bulk herb. I prefer Sleepytime, as the spearmint is also soothing and makes for a wonderful taste, especially when honey is used. It can be used as needed, mixed in the hydration fluid or any other drink. This can be drunk through the day if tolerated, taking several cups a day.

Ginger – The effects of ginger has been known for ages, and it can be added to any drink as well. Shaved fresh garlic can be seeped into tea, tea bags are available, and capsules can be taken as well. It can be given along with the Chamomile.

Please be aware that these therapies have not been evaluated in large, multi-centered studies. One must always weigh the risks and benefits of each therapy on an individualized basis. Please contact our office if there are any questions or if any issues were to arise.

