

# Diarrhoea

By Professor Dr Christopher Boey, Consultant Paediatric Gastroenterologist

Diarrhoea is characterised by the passing of increased amounts of loose, watery stools more frequently than usual. It is usually a symptom of a gastrointestinal infection, which can be caused by a variety of bacteria (*Shigella*, *Escherichia coli*), viruses (Rotavirus) and parasites. It can also be caused by many diseases such as intestinal diseases, functional bowel diseases and endocrine disorders. Food intolerance or reactions to certain medicines may cause diarrhoea as well.



## Dehydration

Severe diarrhoea can lead to fluid loss (dehydration), and may be life-threatening, particularly in young children. Symptoms of dehydration include dry mouth, sunken eyes, dry wrinkled skin, little or no tears when crying, passing of dark and concentrated urine, and abnormal drowsiness or lethargy.

If your child is dehydrated or is in danger of becoming so, give him oral rehydration salt (ORS) solution as soon as possible. This can be purchased from the doctor or pharmacist. Bring your child to the doctor immediately if he is still dehydrated.

## Watch Out For

Bring your child to the doctor immediately if you notice the following:

- ▶ Your child is not passing urine.
- ▶ Your child has blood in his stools.
- ▶ Your child has diarrhoea and is vomiting.
- ▶ Your child feels weak and dizzy.



## What to Do

- ▶ Give your child plenty of fluids to drink.
- ▶ Continue feeding your child his regular diet or increase breastfeeding.
- ▶ Get advice from your doctor regarding nutrition and supplements.

**Reminder: Do not give medications to stop diarrhoea**