

## Myths

***“If I am careful in my choice of food and beverages, I will not get diarrhea.”***

This is partly true. You can *slightly* reduce your risk of traveler's diarrhea by choosing food that is boiled or served very hot, but even careful eaters often get diarrhea.

***“If I take antibiotics for diarrhea, I will develop a resistance to antibiotics.”***

Taking antibiotics for 1 or 2 days to treat diarrhea does not cause a resistance to antibiotics. But, you do not need to take antibiotics. Travelers' diarrhea usually goes away on its own in 4 to 6 days. If your trip is short, or if you will be riding in a bus or involved in an activity where you do not have access to a bathroom, you may want to take antibiotics to help shorten the time you have diarrhea.

***“It is normal to get travelers' diarrhea. People from other countries who come to the U.S. get diarrhea, too.”***

A child in a poor neighborhood of Lima, Peru, gets diarrhea about 7 times a year. This is a much higher rate than for children in wealthier parts of the world. Visitors to the U.S. get diarrhea at about the same rate as residents of the U.S., which is not very often.

***“If I eat enough garlic or put lemon juice on my food, I never get sick.”***

It is hard to argue with success, but no study has shown that these measures will prevent traveler's diarrhea.

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Travel Services/Family Medical Center  
4245 Roosevelt Way N.E.  
Seattle, WA 98105  
Phone: 206-598-4055  
Fax: 206-598-5720

## Directions to Travel Services/Family Medical Center at UWMC-Roosevelt

*From Interstate 5:* Exit at N.E. 45th St. (#169). Turn right onto N.E. 45th St. Turn right onto Roosevelt Way N.E.

*Going West on State Route 520:* Exit onto I-5 north. Take the 1st exit (#169). Turn right onto N.E. 45th St. Turn right onto Roosevelt Way N.E.

*From UWMC:* Go west on N.E. Pacific St. Turn right onto 15th Ave. N.E.. Turn left onto N.E. 45th St. After 5 blocks, turn left onto Roosevelt Way N.E.

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### Travel Services/Family Medical Center

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# Traveler's Diarrhea

*What you should know*

**Traveler's diarrhea is the most common infectious illness in international travelers. It can be caused by bacteria, viruses, or other organisms. In low-income nations, diarrhea is usually caused by bacteria. Taking antibiotics when you have bacterial diarrhea usually makes it less severe and helps it go away more quickly.**

## Tips for Prevention

- Before you eat, wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol gel or wipe.
- Eat and drink only products that are usually safe. These are:
  - Bottled water, if it is sealed
  - Anything that is boiled or served very hot
  - Carbonated drinks such as soda pop or beer

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- Dry food, such as bread, crackers, and cereal
- Fruits you peel before eating, such as bananas, oranges, and avocados
- Avoid these high-risk products:
  - Tap water, even to brush your teeth, even at a good hotel
  - Food from roadside vendors
  - Raw vegetables (salads and others)
  - Ice (freezing does not kill most germs)
  - Raw meats or seafood
  - Food that has been sitting out for a while, such as under heating lights
- To clean vegetables, boil and cool some water. Add fresh bleach (2 to 4 drops per liter) or iodine tablets (until the water is the color of dark tea). Soak vegetables for at least 30 minutes, or several hours if possible. Drain and rinse again with clean water (boiled and cooled, with bleach or iodine added).
- If you have diarrhea, wash your hands or use an alcohol gel after using the toilet to keep germs from spreading.

### Treating Diarrhea

Try to drink more fluids than the amount you are losing from diarrhea. The color of your urine will tell you if you are drinking enough. It should be pale to clear. Also, your skin should be "elastic." When you pinch yourself and let go, your skin should quickly return to laying flat. If you are not drinking enough fluid, you may have headaches and dizziness, especially when you stand up.

### Diarrhea in Children

Children under age 5 are at greater risk for getting dehydrated. If your child gets diarrhea, do **not** give them Imodium or Pepto-Bismol. If an infant is breastfeeding and has diarrhea, continue breastfeeding. An infant or toddler should have at least 1 wet diaper every 4 to 6 hours. If there is more time between wet diapers, the child needs more fluids and should be seen by a health care provider. Seek medical care right away if your child has vomiting and diarrhea.

#### For Mild Diarrhea (Loose Stool):

- Nothing, or loperamide (Imodium A-D)

#### For Severe (Watery) Diarrhea:

- Loperamide (Imodium A-D)
- Plus an antibiotic:
  - a *quinolone* such as Cipro, if you are in Latin America or Africa
  - a *macrolide* such as azithromycin, if you are in Southeast Asia or the Indian subcontinent

**Cipro dose:** 500 mg, every 12 hours. Stop when you are better. See a doctor if you are not better within 2 to 3 days.

**Azithromycin dose (for adults):** 1 dose of 1 gram (four 250 mg tablets).

**Rifaximin (Xifaxan) dose:** Take 200 mg 3 times a day for 3 days, if needed. Used for people who may not be able to tolerate other antibiotics.

#### Cautions About Quinolones such as Cipro

Rarely, *tendinitis* (achy, sore tendons) and other tendon problems occur in people taking quinolones. This risk is higher if you are taking a steroid such as prednisone. If you get tendon symptoms, stop taking quinolones.

Quinolones should **not** be taken by anyone under the age of 18 years, or women who are pregnant or are nursing.

### Severe Signs and Symptoms

See a doctor right away if you have diarrhea and also have:

- Fever higher than 101°F (38.3°C)
- Blood in your stool
- Severe abdominal pain

If you have any of these symptoms, do **not** take an anti-mobility agent such as loperamide. It is OK to take an antibiotic, but also see a doctor.

### Staying Hydrated

Traveler's diarrhea does not usually cause dehydration in healthy adults. Oral fluids (water, juice, pop, tea) can usually replace the fluid that is lost.

But, diarrhea can cause dehydration in children under 5 years, in adults over 65 years, and in people who are taking drugs that remove fluid from the body (*diuretics*). For these people, an *oral rehydration solution* should be used. You may use pre-packaged salts or mix your own.

### Oral Rehydration Solution

To 1 liter of clean water, add:

- 8 level teaspoons of sugar
- 1 level teaspoon of salt

To improve the taste, you can also add a little pasteurized juice, such as apple or orange juice.