What is diarrhea?

Diarrhea occurs when the intestines push stools through before the water in the stools can be reabsorbed by the body. This causes bowel movements to occur more frequently and stools to become watery and loose. A person who has diarrhea may also have abdominal cramps and nausea.

What causes diarrhea?

The exact cause of diarrhea is often difficult to pinpoint. Viral stomach flu or food poisoning often causes diarrhea. Many medications, especially antibiotics, can cause diarrhea; so can laxatives, if they are overused. For some people, emotional stress, anxiety, or food intolerance may bring on this problem.

Helpful hints

- Don't eat any food for several hours or until you are feeling better. Take frequent, small sips of water or a rehydration drink.
- Avoid antidiarrheal drugs for the first 6 hours. After that, use them only if there are no other signs of illness, such as fever, cramping or discomfort, or bloody stools.
- After the first 24 hours (or sooner, depending on how you feel), begin eating mild foods, such as rice, dry toast or crackers, bananas, and applesauce. Avoid spicy foods, other fruits, alcohol, and drinks that contain caffeine until 48 hours after all symptoms have disappeared. Avoid dairy products for 3 days after symptoms disappear.
- If diarrhea continues for more than 48 hours or if you become dehydrated, seek medical attention.