

# CARING FOR CHILDREN WITH DIARRHOEA

## THE IDEA

Diarrhoea is dangerous because it can both kill and cause malnutrition. It can be prevented by **keeping clean, using clean water and by eating properly**. Children who get diarrhoea may die because they become **dehydrated**, that is, their body loses too much water. The liquid they lose must be put back in their bodies. A **Special Drink** can be made by children to help replace the lost water when a child has diarrhoea and prevent dehydration.



## What is Diarrhoea?

Diarrhoea means frequent, watery stools. Often children with diarrhoea also vomit and have severe pains in the abdomen or tummy. The stools may smell strongly and also pass noisily. Diarrhoea is caused by swallowing germs which can live in dirty food and water and human or animal stools. The body tries to get rid of the bad germs from the body through the diarrhoea.

## Diarrhoea is Dangerous

Children who have diarrhoea lose a lot of water, especially if they are vomiting and have a fever. Children may die of diarrhoea, usually because they lose too much water and salts from their bodies and nobody helps them to drink. This loss of water and salts is called **dehydration**. The family should understand that the water lost in diarrhoea needs to be quickly replaced.

## What to Do When a Child Has Diarrhoea

Act immediately! Do not wait for signs of severe dehydration.

We can prevent serious dehydration occurring by doing the following:

- Give the child plenty to drink to replace the water that is lost, as soon as the diarrhoea starts;
- Give the child enough food to keep him/her strong.

## What Are the Signs of Dehydration?

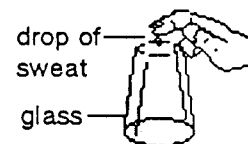
The child is thirsty, or may appear irritable, restless or half-asleep. The mouth and tongue become dry and there are few tears when the child cries. Eyes appear sunken and when the skin is pinched, it returns to normal slowly.

These signs only appear if the child becomes **very dehydrated** from diarrhoea. A child with these signs is in **great danger**.

Take the child to a health worker if any of these danger signs of dehydration begin or if the diarrhoea lasts more than two days. Keep giving the child liquids (the Special Drink is best) while going to the health centre.

### Children do science when they

- Observe ... by tasting, that their sweat is salty
- Investigate sweat ... by putting some of their sweat onto a piece of clean glass, and allowing it to evaporate
- Infer ... that the body loses salt during sweating, because salt dissolves in water
- Understand ... that salt is lost in the same way during diarrhoea
- Measure ... the amount of sugar, salt and water needed to make a special drink for children with diarrhoea
- Observe ... by tasting the special drink, that it is not very salty. *(It should be no more salty than tears, a little less salty than sweat. Too much salt in the drink can make the sick child worse.)*



*Water in the sweat evaporates. Salt is left on the glass.*