

3. Medicines

Medicines are not important for most cases of children with diarrhoea and in all cases are less important than fluids and food. NEVER give medicine without the advice of a health worker. Anything that puts water back into the child helps to fight dehydration, e.g.:

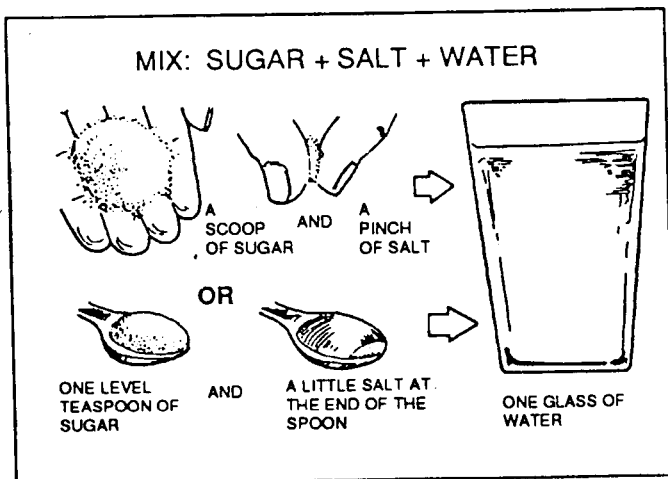
- many of the herbal teas and soups that mothers give to children;
- mother's breastmilk which gives the child both food and water. It is important to continue breastfeeding a baby with diarrhoea. (Milk in a bottle is never as good as breastmilk.);
- rice water (the water in which rice has been boiled) or any other liquid in which food has been cooked, with a little salt, is an excellent liquid for preventing dehydration;
- any other liquid drink, e.g. coconut water, lime or lemon water, diluted fruit juice, weak tea or soups.

The Special Drink

The best liquid is a Special Drink, called Oral Rehydration Solution. This drink can be made from packets of oral rehydration salts, available from health centres and sometimes shops. However, children can easily make the Special Drink themselves using salt, sugar and clean water and so help to treat diarrhoea in younger children and babies.

Making the Special Drink

The Special Drink is very easy to make. For one glass at a time:



For larger quantities, mix FIVE to EIGHT level teaspoonfuls of sugar, plus ONE level teaspoonful of salt with ONE LITRE of clean water. (A teaspoon is a small spoon that holds not more than 5 ml of water.) In your community, it may be easier to make smaller quantities than a litre at a time. The children can consult their teacher/health worker to see what quantity is normally used locally.

REMEMBER!

BEFORE GIVING THE DRINK, TASTE IT!
IT SHOULD BE NO MORE SALTY THAN TEARS

If it is too salty, then throw it away, and make the drink again, using less salt. Make just enough for 24 hours. Next day, throw away any that is left over and make some more if necessary.

Ways of measuring the Special Drink may be a bit different from place to place. The children can find out from the health worker how mothers are taught to make the Special Drink. How do they measure the water, sugar and salt?

How to Give the Special Drink

The Special Drink must be given as soon as the diarrhoea starts, that is, as soon as the stools are watery. Give a little at a time in sips from the glass or from a spoon. Even if the child does not want it, or spits, gently insist, and persuade him to drink it all, a little at a time. Even if a child vomits, wait ten minutes, then try again. The amount he vomits will be less than you have given him. Let the child rest after every five sips if he wants to. This may take some time, day and night, and older children can help their mother by taking turns during the night.

How Much?

The drink should be given each time a stool is passed. A child under two should have half a glass each time. An older child requires a full glass each time. An adult needs two cups each time. Continue giving the Special Drink as long as the stools are even a bit watery. Do not stop until both urine and stools are normal. This may take 1 or 2 days or even longer.

ACTIVITIES

Children can collect information about diarrhoea and how common and dangerous it is. How many times have their younger brothers and sisters had diarrhoea in the last year (or during the last rainy season, or since some big festival)? They can find out at what ages it is most common by counting how many times children of different ages had diarrhoea.

They can see how often breastfed babies and bottled babies get diarrhoea. Which get diarrhoea the most? Why?

How many children in the community have died of diarrhoea? This information can be used later to help decide if different health activities have made a difference to children's health.