



The Surgical Institute
at True North

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Chronic Diarrhea in Adults

Chronic diarrhea is defined as loose stools that last for at least 4 weeks. This usually means three or more loose stools per day. Chronic diarrhea can have a substantial impact on your quality of life and overall health. At its mildest, diarrhea is an inconvenience; at its worst, it may be disabling and even life threatening.

Chronic Diarrhea Causes

A wide range of problems can cause chronic diarrhea; some of the most common causes include irritable bowel syndrome, inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis), malabsorption syndromes, and chronic infections. There are also many other less common causes of chronic diarrhea.

Chronic Diarrhea Evaluation

Blood, stool, and urine tests can help determine the underlying cause, firm up the bowel movements, and treat any diarrhea-related complications.

Treating the cause - The underlying cause of chronic diarrhea should be found and treated whenever possible. For example, infections may be treated with antibiotics. In people with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, long term treatment and follow-up is needed. In some cases, treatment may be as simple as eliminating a food or medicine

Treating Complications - Chronic or severe diarrhea can lead to potentially severe complications, including dehydration and malnutrition. While you are being evaluated, you should be sure to drink plenty of fluids. You are drinking enough fluids if your urine is a light yellow color.

If you are not able to drink enough fluids and you become dehydrated, you may be given fluids into a vein (IV) to replace the fluids and electrolytes (salts) lost in diarrhea. This will not cure your diarrhea, but it can prevent more serious complications.