

## Medications to Treat Traveler's Diarrhea Guidelines & precautions for usage

Keeping hydrated during a bout with traveler's diarrhea is the most important treatment. Use an oral rehydraton solution (ORS) to replenish lost fluids and electrolytes, if possible. If symptoms persist or are uncomfortable, you may add one of the following medications (along with hydration efforts) for relief:

- **Anti-motility agents.** These agents (e.g., Imodium, Lomotil, etc.) provide prompt but temporary relief by reducing muscle spasms in your gastrointestinal tract, slowing the transit time through your digestive system and allowing more time for absorption. They aren't recommended for infants or people with fever or bloody diarrhea, as they can delay clearance of the infectious organisms and make the illness worse. Also, don't use them if the signs and symptoms last more than 48 hours. In such cases, see a doctor.<sup>1</sup>
- **Bismuth subsalicylate** (Pepto-Bismol). This over-the-counter medication can decrease the frequency of your stools and shorten the duration of your illness.<sup>1</sup> Several studies also show that taking bismuth subsalicylate as either 2 tablets 4 times a day or 2 fluid ounces 4 times a day reduces the incidence of traveler's diarrhea.<sup>2</sup> Bismuth subsalicylate, however, is not recommended for children, pregnant women, or people who are allergic to aspirin.<sup>1,2</sup>

- **Antibiotics.** If you have severe symptoms or three or more loose stools within eight hours, a doctor may prescribe a three- to five-day course of antibiotics.<sup>1</sup> Antibiotics are generally not recommended as prophylactics (drugs taken to prevent rather than to treat) for traveler's diarrhea, because of the possible development of resistant bacteria, increased sensitivity to the sun, intestinal side effects, allergies, and yeast infections in women.<sup>3</sup> It is better to be meticulous with food, water, hand-washing, and hygiene.<sup>3</sup>

Sources:

1. Mayo Clinic (2007). Traveler's diarrhea [on-line]. Retrieved February 20, 2008. From <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/travelers-diarrhea/DS00318>.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2006). Travelers' diarrhea [on-line]. Retrieved February 21, 2008. From [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/travelersdiarrhea\\_g.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/travelersdiarrhea_g.htm).
3. University of Maryland Medical Center (2007). Travel medicine: Guide for the adventurous traveler [on-line]. Retrieved February 20, 2008. From <http://www.umm.edu/travel/guide.htm>.