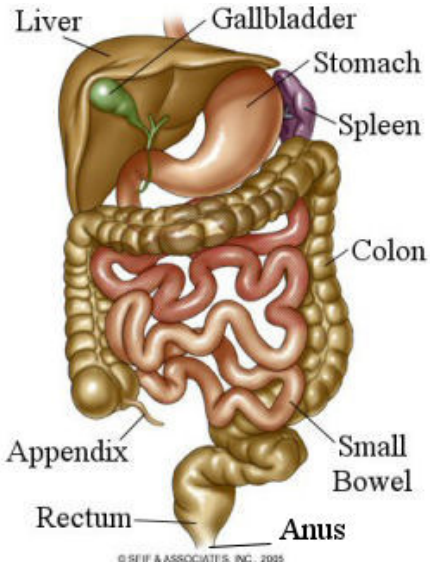
Clostridium Difficile Diarrhea (CDD)

Clostridium difficile (C. diff) is a bacteria found in the intestinal tract (*bowel*). Under certain conditions, it causes diarrhea and sometimes severe disease. The severe form of the disease is known as pseudomembranous colitis (often called C.diff colitis).



CAUSES

Your colon normally has many different bacteria, including C. diff. The balance of bacteria in your colon can change during illness. This is especially true when you take antibiotics. Taking antibiotics may allow the C. diff to grow, multiply excessively and make a toxin that then causes the illness.

SYMPTOMS

- Watery diarrhea.
- Fever.
- Loss of appetite.
- Nausea.
- Cramping.
- Abdominal pain/tenderness.
- Sudden need to have a bowel movement.
- Bloody diarrhea.

DIAGNOSIS

Your description of diarrhea may make your caregiver suspicious of a C. diff illness. This is especially true if you have used antibiotics in the preceding weeks. However, there are many causes of diarrhea, and treatments differ greatly. There are only 2 ways to know whether or not you have C.diff or C.diff colitis. Your caregiver will help determine if these tests are necessary:

- A laboratory test that finds the toxin in your stool.
- A specific appearance of an abnormality (*pseudomembrane*) in your colon. This can only be seen by doing a sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy (an instrument is passed through your rectum to look at the inside of your colon).

PREVENTION

C.diff and C.diff colitis are almost always related to antibiotic use. Careful hand washing by you and care providers is important to prevent the spread of infection. You will notice in the hospital that your caregivers may also put on gowns and gloves to prevent the spread of the C. diff bacteria. In addition, your room is regularly cleaned with a hospital grade disinfectant.

PROGNOSIS

Most people with C.diff recover with the right treatment. Relapses following treatment do occur.

This can be a deadly disease if untreated and if you also have other severe diseases at the same time.

RISKS AND COMPLICATIONS

Dehydration and electrolyte imbalance can occur with ongoing diarrhea. Rarely, the colon can develop a hole (*perforate*) with this disease. A condition called toxic megacolon is a very severe complication.

TREATMENT

- Most people are successfully treated with 1 of 2 specific antibiotics usually given by mouth. Other antibiotics you are receiving are stopped if possible.

- IV fluids and correction of electrolyte imbalance may be necessary.
- Medications to slow down or stop the diarrhea are not used.
- If this illness becomes persistent or very recurrent, treatment can be difficult. Rarely, bacteria from a healthy donor is inserted into the colon for treatment.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Drink plenty of fluids. **AVOID** milk, caffeine, and alcohol.
- Eat a BRAT diet to try to slow the diarrhea (**b**anana, **r**ice, **a**pplesauce, **t**oast). Small, frequent meals may be better than large meals.
- Take antibiotic medication as prescribed. **DO NOT** use medications to slow the diarrhea. This could delay healing or cause complications.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after using the toilet.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Diarrhea persists longer than expected or recurs after completing your course of antibiotic treatment.
- You have trouble staying hydrated.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop a new fever.
- You develop increasing abdominal pain or tenderness.
- You develop blood in the stool, or the stool is dark black and tar-like.
- You cannot hold down food or liquids.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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