

## BRAT diet: Benefits, risks, and treating diarrhea

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The BRAT diet is sometimes used for the treatment of diarrhea, stomach flu, and other types of stomach illness.

Because the foods included on the BRAT diet are low in protein, fat, and fiber, they are considered to be easily digestible.

However, there are several risks associated with this diet, including nutrient and calorie deficiencies. As a result, many health organizations no longer recommend it as a treatment option.

This article looks at the benefits and risks associated with the BRAT diet. It also discusses ways to treat [diarrhea \(/articles/158634.php\)](#).

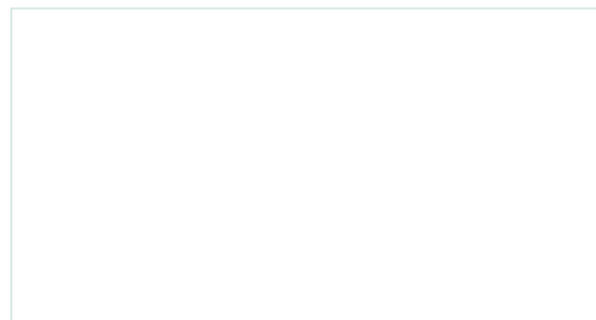
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## What is the BRAT diet?

The term "BRAT" is an acronym for the foods included in the diet. They are:

- Bananas
- Rice
- Applesauce



- Toast

As these foods are bland and relatively easy to digest, some people believe they can reduce the symptoms of stomach illness, such as nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting and encourage a quicker recovery.

## How does the BRAT diet work?



Alongside applesauce and toast, the BRAT diet includes bananas and rice.

Eating the foods included in the BRAT diet is believed to benefit an [upset stomach \(/articles/163484.php\)](/articles/163484.php) and diarrhea for several reasons:

- **Firmer stools.** These foods are starchy and low in fiber, which may encourage binding of loose and runny stools.
- **Gentle on the stomach.** Because the foods are low in fat and protein, they are unlikely to irritate the stomach and put [stress \(/articles/145855.php\)](/articles/145855.php) on the digestive system.
- **No nausea.** Due to the bland flavor and absence of strong smells, BRAT foods do not tend to cause nausea or vomiting.

## Is the BRAT diet effective?

Although people have been recommended the BRAT diet for decades, no recent clinical trials have been undertaken to determine if the BRAT diet is effective for the treatment of diarrhea or gastrointestinal illness.

However, some studies have been carried out on both [bananas \(/articles/271157.php\)](/articles/271157.php) and rice and their role in treating diarrhea.

Bananas contain pectin, a starch that is beneficial for the digestive tract.

One [2010 study \(https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20831671\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20831671) found that children with diarrhea who followed a green banana-supplemented diet recovered faster than those who did not eat the bananas.

[Another study \(https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27556051\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27556051) showed rice to effectively treat diarrhea when used together with a prescribed oral rehydration solution.

## Is the BRAT diet safe?

While following the BRAT diet for a limited time (no longer than 48 hours) is unlikely to cause harm, people should avoid long-term use of the diet.

This is because prolonged use of the BRAT diet may lead to [malnutrition \(/articles/179316.php\)](/articles/179316.php) and low energy because it does not contain sufficient levels of:

- [calories \(/articles/245588.php\)](/articles/245588.php)

- protein
- fat
- fiber
- [vitamin \(/articles/195878.php\) A](/articles/195878.php)
- vitamin B12
- [calcium \(/articles/248958.php\)](/articles/248958.php)

Due to the risks and restrictive nature of the diet, the American Academy of Pediatrics no longer recommends (<http://www.aafp.org/afp/2012/0601/p1066.html>) the use of the BRAT diet for children with diarrhea. However, if these foods are part of the child's usual diet, they can continue to eat them in addition to a variety of other foods.

## Other foods to eat

Those who wish to follow the BRAT diet for a limited time may add other bland foods to their diet. Other bland foods include:

- saltine crackers
- clear broths
- potatoes (without any butter, cream, or other additives)
- sweet potatoes
- steamed, baked, or grilled chicken (without skin or fat)
- chicken or vegetable broth
- oatmeal
- watermelon



Other bland foods that may be added include oatmeal, clear broths, and saltine crackers.

Also, the following may be helpful in managing episodes of diarrhea:

## Fluids

Because diarrhea can lead to dehydration (</articles/153363.php>), it is important that people drink enough fluids. A person with diarrhea should drink liquids such as:

- water
- clear broths
- apple juice
- weak tea

- herbal teas, especially [ginger](http://articles/265990.php) ([/articles/265990.php](http://articles/265990.php)) and peppermint
- coconut water

## Oral rehydration products

Oral rehydration products can be purchased over-the-counter at a pharmacy. They can come as a liquid, a popsicle, or powder to mix with water.

Oral rehydration therapy can be used to treat diarrhea in adults and children with mild to moderate (<http://www.aafp.org/afp/2012/0601/p1066.html>) dehydration by following the instructions on the packaging.

Sugary drinks may make symptoms worse in some.

## Probiotics and probiotic-rich foods

Certain beneficial bacteria, known as probiotics, may shorten the course of diarrhea. Bacteria that show the most promise for treating diarrhea include *Lactobacillus reuteri*, *Lactobacillus GG*, and *Saccharomyces boulardii*.

A [review](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21069673) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21069673>) of 63 studies suggests that a combination of oral rehydration products and probiotics may reduce the duration of diarrhea by 24 hours, while also reducing stool frequency. However, the research did not include which types of probiotics were most beneficial.

Natural yogurt is an excellent source of beneficial bacteria. Other foods that are high in probiotics include:

- kefir
- fermented vegetables
- sauerkraut
- miso soup
- kombucha

## Foods to avoid

While maintaining a normal diet is often recommended during episodes of stomach illness or diarrhea, some foods are more likely than others to trigger nausea, vomiting, or loose stools.

These include:

- **Dairy products.** Milk, cream, cheese, and ice cream can be difficult to digest during an illness. However, natural yogurt and milk kefir are exceptions, as they contain beneficial bacteria that significantly reduce lactose.



Foods that should be avoided include dairy products such as milk and cheese.

- **Sugar.** Foods high in sugar, such as cakes, cookies, sodas, candy, and chocolate can make symptoms worse.
- **High-fat foods and fried foods.** Greasy foods can be difficult to digest and make diarrhea worse.
- **Alcohol.** Alcohol is a diuretic and can cause dehydration. Alcohol can also irritate the stomach.
- **Caffeine.** [Coffee \(/articles/270202.php\)](/articles/270202.php), cola drinks, and black tea all contain caffeine, which may act as a mild diuretic.
- **Spicy foods.** These can irritate an already sensitive stomach.
- **Artificial sweeteners.** Alternative sweeteners, including sorbitol and sucralose, can cause diarrhea in some people.
- **Some vegetables and beans.** Vegetables, such as broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage, along with all forms of beans, tend to cause intestinal gas and bloating. While this is not usually a cause for concern, people with a stomach illness may need to avoid these foods until they have recovered.
- **Heavy proteins, such as steak, pork, and salmon.** Protein is difficult to digest and may cause additional stress on the stomach, especially if it is high in fat.

## When to see a doctor

People should consult a doctor if diarrhea:

- persists beyond 2 days
- is accompanied by a temperature of 102°F or greater
- is frequent, recurrent, or severe
- is accompanied by rectal pain or bleeding

Similarly, people should seek medical care for symptoms of dehydration, which include:

- reduced urine output
- [dry mouth \(/articles/187640.php\)](/articles/187640.php)
- thirst
- feeling light-headed, dizzy, or weak

Take infants and children to see a doctor if they experience vomiting or diarrhea for more than 24 hours, if they cannot produce tears or display sunken cheeks, or if they exhibit any of the symptoms listed above.

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### References

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#### Additional information

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