

# Travelers' Diarrhea

Travelers know not to drink the tap water in underdeveloped parts of the world. Most cases of travelers' diarrhea, however, come from eating contaminated food. The usual advice to "boil it, cook it, peel it or forget it" is good, but even very careful travelers will have problems. Fifty percent of travelers staying in undeveloped countries, for more than two weeks, will get travelers' diarrhea. Those who wish to avoid the illness can take two Pepto-Bismol tablets four times a day, but they should not be surprised when they see the black bowel movements that Pepto-Bismol causes.



The typical illness is characterized by cramps and 2-5 bowel movements per day and these symptoms can last for 3-5 days. Treatment with antibiotics, either ciprofloxacin or azithromycin, can shorten the course of the illness to 1-2 days. Ciprofloxacin is taken twice a day and usually prescribe for three days, but it can be stopped after one or two days if symptoms improve. Azithromycin is taken as a single dose of two 500 mg tablets. Twenty percent of people taking this dose will experience nausea. Pepto-Bismol in doses described above or Imodium, 1-2 tabs at the onset of diarrhea followed by additional tablets, not to exceed a total dose of four tablets over 24 hours, can also help with symptoms. Azithromycin is the treatment recommended for trips to Southeast Asia and India. Ciprofloxacin works fine for the rest of the world.