



DEALING WITH CANCER SIDE EFFECTS: DIARRHEA

A generic definition of diarrhea is the movement of three or more loose or watery stools a day. Everyone has a normal bowel movement pattern. An increase in looseness or frequency of stools from your normal pattern is what defines diarrhea for you. Many medications, including some chemotherapy and antibiotics, radiation treatment, surgery, supplemental feedings, infection or tumor growth can cause diarrhea. Diarrhea associated with chemotherapy and radiation can last up to three weeks after treatment ends. Diarrhea occurs when food passes quickly through the bowel before the body gets enough nutrition in the form of vitamins, minerals, and water. Diarrhea can lead to dehydration, electrolyte imbalances, and weight loss.

Diet and Fluids

- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluids each day. Fluids such as dilute fruit juices and tea, noncarbonated fruit drinks, sport drinks, and broth are recommended. Avoid carbonated and caffeinated beverages which can worsen diarrhea. Drink an additional cup of fluid for every episode of diarrhea to ensure fluid replacement.
- Eat plenty of foods and liquids containing salt (sodium) and potassium. The body loses these minerals with diarrhea. Try broth, tomato juice, diluted orange juice, or sports drinks.
- Avoids extremes in hot or cold foods and fluids. Extreme temperatures can stimulate the movement in the gastrointestinal tract.
- Avoid milk and milk products (except yogurt) because the gastrointestinal tract can have problems digesting milk products while irritated from diarrhea.
- Avoid high fiber food such as whole grain bread, cereal, fresh fruit, vegetables, and popcorn. (See the attached list of foods to avoid during diarrhea.)
- Avoid spicy foods, alcohol, and tobacco that can increase stomach acid and further irritate the stomach lining. Avoid fatty foods because they can cause bloating and cramping and are poorly absorbed at this time.
- Eat 6 small frequent meals throughout the day instead of 3 large meals. Complex carbohydrates such as rice, potatoes, pasta, toast, applesauce, canned fruits, bananas and cooked vegetables are well tolerated. Good protein sources include eggs, yogurt and broiled or baked chicken or fish.
- Your health care provider can recommend over-the-counter anti-diarrhea products such as Imodium AD[®], and Kaopectate[®].
- Keep the rectal area clean and dry using mild soap and water. Soaking in a warm tub, sitz baths or topical creams (i.e. Desitin[®], A & D Ointment[®]) can be helpful in relieving discomfort. **(OVER)**

Important Points to Remember

- Notify your health care provider if you have more than 3 to 4 watery stools per day, or if diarrhea lasts beyond 1 to 2 days. You may want to keep a record of the amount and frequency of your bowel movements.
- The following symptoms that occur with diarrhea should also be reported:
 - ✧ Lightheadedness
 - ✧ Inability to urinate for 6 hours or more
 - ✧ Constant abdominal cramps or pain
 - ✧ Abdominal puffiness or bloating that occurs suddenly
 - ✧ Several days of constipation and small amounts of liquid stool oozing out (may be an impaction),
 - ✧ Diarrhea that continues despite anything you do
 - ✧ Fever
 - ✧ Weight loss greater than 5 lbs.
 - ✧ Blood in anal area or stool
- If diarrhea is severe, a clear liquid diet for 12 to 24 hours may be ordered by your health care provider to allow your stomach to rest. Research has shown that extending the "resting period" or limiting foods does not shorten the duration of the diarrhea and will cause you to lose more weight.
- Be sure to wash your hands thoroughly before eating and after using the toilet.
- Glutamine is an amino acid that can repair the gastrointestinal tract and can increase energy. It may be helpful in limiting diarrhea that results from pelvic radiation or receiving certain chemotherapy drugs. Contact the dietitian for more information.

Foods to Avoid When Diarrhea Occurs

- Limit milk products to 2 cups per day, or less.
- Avoid foods and beverages containing pepper, alcohol, or caffeine that can irritate the gastrointestinal tract
- Avoid dried beans, peas, pumpkin, corn, and squash.
- Avoid gas-producing vegetables such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, onions, cauliflower, cucumber, green peppers, rutabagas, turnips, sauerkraut.
- Avoid olives, relishes, and pickles.
- Avoid dried fruits, berries, and figs.
- No high fiber grains/cereals, bran, shredded wheat, granola, wheat germ, or whole grain rye and wheat products.
- Avoid seeds in or on breads, rolls, and crackers.
- Limit chips and popcorn.
- No nuts or chunky peanut butter.
- Avoid citrus juices such as orange and pineapple juice.
- Avoid spicy, rich, fried and greasy foods.