

Managing Diarrhea from Cancer Treatment

Diarrhea is having three or more watery bowel movements (poops) per day. This is a common side effect of radiation therapy and chemotherapy. Diarrhea can lead to dehydration and weight loss. It may be helpful to make temporary changes to your diet to help manage diarrhea. Speak with your health care team if you have an ileostomy or colostomy as you may need specific recommendations.

Fluids

When you have diarrhea, you lose more fluid and are at risk of becoming dehydrated. Talk with your nurse or doctor at the cancer centre if you have any of these signs of dehydration:

- Headache
- Dark, yellow urine or urinating less often
- Dry mouth
- Dizziness when standing up

Sip these fluids throughout the day (unless you have been told to drink less fluid)	Limit
Water	Sugary drinks – regular pop, fruit juice, fruit drinks, iced tea, regular sports drinks
Milk or milk alternatives (non-dairy)	Caffeine – including coffee, tea, colas, energy drinks
Broth	Alcohol including beer, wine and hard liquor
Electrolyte replacement beverages, such as Pedialyte® or low sugar sports drinks such as G2®	

Homemade Electrolyte Drink Recipe:

- 1 ½ cups (360 mL) orange juice (pulp free)
- 2 ½ cups (600 mL) water
- ½ tsp salt

Drink at least ¼ cup (60mL) of this every 2 hours until diarrhea resolves.



Foods

- Eat smaller amounts of food every 2-3 hours instead of large meals
- Limit spicy, greasy and high fat foods
- Add more soluble fibre to your diet and limit your intake of insoluble fibre
- You may find it helpful to limit lactose-containing foods for a period of time

Fibre

If you have diarrhea from your treatment, it may help to *temporarily* change the kind of fibre you eat. Fibre is found in plant foods and there are two types: **soluble fibre** and **insoluble fibre**.

Soluble fibre mixes with water. This fibre will make your stools (poop) more solid and slow down how fast it moves through your gut. If you have diarrhea, include more soluble fibre in your diet.



Insoluble fibre does not hold water. It also does not break down easily, so it may make your diarrhea worse. If you have diarrhea, limit insoluble fibre.

Choose foods higher in soluble fibre	Limit foods higher in insoluble fibre
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peeled apples or applesauce • Bananas • Barley, oatmeal or oat bran • Avocado • Smooth peanut butter • Peeled potatoes or sweet potatoes <p><i>Ask your cancer care team if a soluble fibre supplement (such as psyllium) is right for you.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wheat bran or bran cereals • Whole grain products • Legumes (chickpeas, kidney beans, black beans, lentils) • Leafy green vegetables (kale, lettuce) • Broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts • Nuts and seeds • Dried fruit • Popcorn

! You can reduce the amount of insoluble fibre in vegetables and fruit by peeling them and removing the seeds

Dairy

Dairy products include milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream.

If you have more gas, bloating or diarrhea 30 to 60 minutes after eating or drinking dairy products, you may tolerate lactose-free dairy products better. Also, plant based dairy alternatives are lactose-free and include soy, almond, or oat beverage.



You may also try lactase enzyme tablets, which can help you digest the lactose found in dairy products. Follow the dose instructions on the package.

Probiotics

It is not recommended to use probiotic supplements to help manage diarrhea from your cancer treatment. Probiotic supplements and foods with added probiotics are not recommended for people with compromised immune systems.

How long do I follow this advice?

When you are no longer having diarrhea, you can slowly return to your usual way of eating and drinking.

Medications

Talk to your nurse or doctor to see if you should use an anti-diarrhea medication.

Ask to speak with a Registered Dietitian at the cancer centre if you are eating less than usual and experiencing unplanned weight loss.

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