



Getting Help for Diarrhea

Diarrhea is passing loose or watery stools many times a day and more often than is normal for you. It can happen with or without cramps or belly pain. You may need to get to the bathroom right away. Diarrhea happens when water in the intestine is not being absorbed back into the body. Uncontrolled diarrhea can lead to weight loss, fluid loss, poor appetite, and weakness.

Diarrhea can be caused by

- Chemotherapy, targeted therapy, or immunotherapy
- Radiation therapy to the pelvic area
- Infection
- Some medicines
- Tumor growth
- Surgery
- Stress
- Eating foods that may not agree with you
- An overflow of intestinal liquids around stool that's stuck in the intestine (this is called an impaction)

What you can do if you have diarrhea

Ask your health care team if any of your cancer treatments can cause diarrhea. Depending on the cause of diarrhea, some of these tips might be helpful for you.

Eat these things

- A clear liquid diet, which may include water, weak tea, apple juice, clear broth, and clear gelatin
- Salty foods, such as broths, soups, sports drinks, crackers, and pretzels

- High-potassium foods, such as fruit juices and nectars, sports drinks, potatoes with the skin, and bananas
- Small amounts of food that are easy to digest, like rice, noodles, skinned turkey and chicken, white toast, mashed potatoes, and well-cooked eggs

Do not eat, drink, or use these things

- Foods that are very hot or spicy
- High-fiber foods, like nuts, seeds, whole grains, beans and peas, dried fruits, and raw fruits and vegetables
- High-fat foods, such as fried and greasy foods
- Drinks with caffeine
- Acidic drinks, such as tomato juice, citrus juices, and fizzy soft drinks
- Sugar-free chewing gum and candies made with sugar alcohol (i.e., sorbitol, mannitol, or xylitol)
- Pastries, candies, rich desserts, and jellies
- Milk or milk products. Yogurt and buttermilk are usually OK.
- Don't drink alcohol or use tobacco.

What you can do to feel better

- Sip liquids all day to prevent dehydration. Try Popsicles, gelatin, and ice chips. Ask your health care team what a safe amount of liquids is for you.
- Avoid drinking liquids with caffeine.
- Eat small meals and snacks often during the day.
- Try to drink at least 1 cup of liquid after each loose bowel movement.
- Clean your bottom with a mild soap after each bowel movement, rinse well with warm water, and pat dry. Or, use unscented baby wipes to clean yourself.
- Apply a water-repellent ointment, such as A&D Ointment or petroleum jelly, to your bottom.
- Sit in a tub of warm water or a sitz bath to help reduce discomfort.

Other tips

- Keep a record of your bowel movements to help decide when to call the doctor.
- Check with your doctor before using any over-the-counter diarrhea medicine.
- Talk to the doctor about using a prescription medicine.
- Take medicine for diarrhea as prescribed by your doctor.
- If your diarrhea gets bad (meaning that you have 7 or 8 loose stools in 24 hours), tell your doctor right away. You may need to try a clear liquid diet to give your bowels time to rest.
- Once the diarrhea has stopped, start small regular meals. Slowly start eating foods that contain fiber.

Talk to your health care team if

- You have loose bowel movements many times a day for 1 to 4 days, depending on instructions given by your health care team.
- You are dizzy or feel like you may pass out.
- The diarrhea doesn't get better or gets worse.
- Your stools have an unusual smell or color.
- You have blood in the stool or around the anus.
- You don't urinate (pee) for 12 or more hours.
- You can't drink liquids for 24 hours or more.
- You have new belly pain, cramps, or a swollen belly.
- You have a fever. Your health care team will let you know what temperature a fever is.
- You've been constipated for several days and then start to pass small amounts of liquid stool. (This may mean you have an impaction or severe constipation.)

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and emotional support, call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** or visit us online at www.cancer.org. We're here when you need us.



cancer.org | 1.800.227.2345

