

Diarrhea

What is Diarrhea?

Diarrhea means having more than four or five liquid bowel movements in a 24-hour period. Diarrhea that happens during cancer treatment has many causes:

- Bowel or stomach surgeries
- Infections
- Medicines such as chemotherapy, antibiotics, antacids, some anti-inflammatory medicines, and laxatives
- Radiation to the abdomen and pelvis
- Stress and anxiety

Things to Eat and Drink

- Drink plenty of water, clear broths, sport drinks, ginger ale, or teas without caffeine.
- Eat small meals that include applesauce, rice, toast, and pasta.
- Choose foods high in potassium such as potatoes, oranges, and bananas.
- Add fiber to your diet. Fiber absorbs the extra water and adds bulk to the stool. Try using fiber pills such as Fibercon and FiberChoice, but ask your doctor or nurse before taking anything.
- Ask your doctor or nurse if you should follow a clear liquid diet to give your bowels a rest for a day or two.

Things to Avoid

- Fruit juices with a lot of sugar
- Very hot or very cold liquids
- Caffeinated drinks such as coffee and cola
- Milk and milk products
- Alcohol
- Spicy foods
- Foods that cause gas such as broccoli and cabbage

How is Diarrhea Treated?

Some medicines can help with diarrhea caused by radiation or chemotherapy. They may not be safe to use with diarrhea caused by an infection. The treatment changes depending on the cause.

- Talk to your cancer care team before taking any medicine to treat your diarrhea.
- Do not take over-the-counter medicines such as Imodium® unless your cancer care team says to.

Skin Care and Comfort

These tips can help keep diarrhea from causing chapped skin:

- Keep your rectal area clean and dry. Wash with mild soap and water. Dry gently with a towel.
- Use alcohol-free baby wipes instead of toilet paper.
- Put on zinc oxide cream (products such as A&D® or Desitin®) to soothe your skin.

When should I call my doctor or nurse?

Call right away if any of these happen:

- Bloody diarrhea
- Diarrhea that lasts more than 24 hours
- A lot of pain or cramping in your stomach
- Fever greater than 100.3°F
- Sores or cracks on your rectum
- Signs of dehydration:
 - Dark-colored urine
 - Less urine than usual
 - Dizziness
 - Dry mouth
 - More thirst than usual

Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

Call your doctor's office: _____

After hours, weekends, and holidays

Call the hospital operator at 801-587-7000, and ask for the oncology fellow on call.