

Diarrhea involves frequent, loose, or watery bowel movements. With diarrhea, you have bowel movements more often than usual. Your "baseline" is the usual number of bowel movements you have in a day. If you have diarrhea during cancer treatment, ask your health care team about how to manage it. Relieving side effects is an important part of cancer care and treatment.

Risks of diarrhea

Although uncomfortable, mild diarrhea usually does not cause serious problems.

But severe diarrhea can cause **dehydration** and electrolyte imbalances. This happens when the body loses too much water. It may also cause other health problems. To avoid such problems, take steps to prevent diarrhea or treat it early.

What general guidelines should I follow?



Relieving diarrhea

- Choose foods with less than 2 g or .07 oz. of fiber per serving.
- Limit fats to less than 8 tsp (38 g or 1.34 oz.) a day.
- Avoid the following:
 - Foods and beverages sweetened with high-fructose corn syrup, honey, or sugar alcohols such as xylitol, sorbitol, and mannitol.
 - Foods that contain a lot of fat or sugar.
 - Fried, greasy, or spicy foods.
 - High-fiber grains, breads, and cereals.
 - Raw fruits and vegetables.
- Eat foods that are rich in probiotics. These foods include dairy products such as yogurt and fermented milk products. They help increase healthy bacteria in the stomach and intestines (*gastrointestinal tract*, or *GI tract*).
- If you have lactose intolerance, avoid dairy products. These may make your diarrhea worse.
- Take medicine to help stop diarrhea (*antidiarrheal* medicine) only as told by your health care provider.

Replacing nutrients

- Eat small meals or snacks every 3–4 hours.
- Eat bland foods, such as white rice, toast, or baked potato, until your diarrhea starts to get better. Gradually reintroduce nutrient-rich foods as tolerated or as told by your health care provider. This includes:
 - Well-cooked protein foods.
 - Peeled, seeded, and soft-cooked fruits and vegetables.
 - Low-fat dairy products.

Preventing dehydration

- Start by sipping water or a special solution to prevent dehydration (*oral rehydration solution*, ORS). Urine that is clear or pale yellow means that you are getting enough fluid.
- Try to drink at least 8–10 cups of fluid each day to help replace lost fluids.
- You may add other liquids in addition to water, such as clear juice or decaffeinated sports drinks, as tolerated or as told by your health care provider.
- Avoid drinks with caffeine, such as coffee, tea, or soft drinks.
- Avoid alcohol.

Summary

- When you have diarrhea, the foods you eat and your eating habits are very important.
- Make sure you get at least 8–10 cups of fluid each day, or enough to keep your urine clear or pale yellow.
- Eat bland foods and gradually reintroduce healthy, nutrient-rich foods as tolerated, or as told by your health care provider. Avoid high-fiber, fried, greasy, or spicy foods.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.