Cancer Therapy: Managing Side Effects - Diarrhea

Diarrhea is frequent, watery stools. You may have cramps, stomach pain, and gas or feel weak with the diarrhea. Diarrhea may be caused by cancer therapy, the cancer itself, infection, antibiotics, stress, or problems with your body’s ability to use food. Having diarrhea for several days can result in dehydration, low protein and chemical imbalances in your blood.

Ways to Help Decrease Diarrhea

- Eat bland foods low in fiber and high in protein and calories:
  - Bananas
  - Rice
  - Applesauce
  - White bread, toast
  - Eggs
  - Yogurt, buttermilk, cheese
  - Rice pudding, custard, tapioca, gelatin
  - Smooth peanut butter
  - Cooked mild vegetables (beets, green beans, wax beans, carrots, peas)
  - Meat, fish, or poultry (white meat)
• Do not eat foods or drink fluids like these:
  ▶ Whole grain bread and cereal
  ▶ Nuts, seeds, coconut
  ▶ Fried, greasy, or fatty foods
  ▶ Raw fruits and vegetables, fruit juices (especially prune and apple)
  ▶ Popcorn, potato chips, pretzels
  ▶ Strong spices/herbs (chili powder, licorice, pepper, curry, garlic, olives, pickles)
  ▶ Broccoli, onions, cabbage and other gas forming foods
  ▶ Caffeine (chocolate, coffee, tea, soft drinks) and cigarettes
  ▶ Alcoholic drinks
  ▶ Foods that contain lactose, like milk or ice cream
  ▶ Carbonated beverages (unless they are allowed to stand open to lose their fizz)
  ▶ Food high in simple sugars (such as candy bars, cookies, etc.)
  ▶ Do not drink very hot or cold liquids. Chew foods slowly with your mouth closed to keep from swallowing air if you have problems with gas or bloating.

More Tips to Help Manage Diarrhea

• Eat small frequent meals and sip liquids slowly.

• Drink at least 8 to 10 large glasses of liquid each day to replace the fluid you are losing. Water or watered down sports drinks with electrolytes are best.

• Only use nutritional supplements as directed by your dietitian, doctor or nurse. Some of these products can make the diarrhea worse.

• Take anti-diarrhea medicines as directed by your doctor. The orders from your doctor may be different from the directions on the box. Medicines used to treat diarrhea may include: Loperamide (Imodium™) and Diphenoxylate/Atropine (Lomotil).

• Do not take antacids that have magnesium, they can increase diarrhea.
- Clean your rectal area with mild soap and warm water or moist towelettes. Do this after each bowel movement to prevent skin irritation. Apply ointments with zinc oxide (Desitin™) to help protect your skin. **Report any soreness, pain or raw skin to your doctor or nurse.**

- Do not take your temperature with a rectal thermometer.
- Do not use suppository medicines.
- Take a warm (not hot) bath. Ask your nurse how to do a sitz bath.
- Get plenty of rest and reduce your activity. Try to relax by using relaxation or imagery techniques, watching TV, listening to music or working on a hobby that calms you.

**Call your doctor if you have any of the following:**

- Diarrhea for more than 24 hours (your doctor will want to know how many stools you are having, the amount and the color)
- A fever, chills, sweating or flu-like symptoms with your diarrhea
- Dry mouth
- Darker than normal urine
- Feel dizzy or faint
- Weakness and fatigue
- Weight loss with the diarrhea

**Where can I get more information and resources?**

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions. If you would like more information, ask for these patient education handouts:

- [Fight Cancer-Related Fatigue with Good Nutrition](#)
- [Using Exercise to Fight Cancer-Related Fatigue](#)
- [Cancer Survivorship](#)
- [Cancer Internet Resources](#)
- [JamesCare for Life Programs](#) - JamesCare for Life offers a wide range of programs to support patients, families and caregivers during and after cancer.

For more information about The James, we encourage you to visit our website at [cancer.osu.edu](https://cancer.osu.edu)