



## Managing diarrhoea

**Diarrhoea is the word used to describe very thin, watery poo, usually associated with a very frequent bowel habit.**

A good fluid intake is very important to prevent you becoming dehydrated if you have diarrhoea. Aim for at least 6 - 8 glasses of water a day, in addition to other drinks and foods. It is worth being aware that tea, coffee (and other caffeine based drinks) may **stimulate** the movement of the bowel and increase problems with diarrhoea.



### Seek medical advice

immediately if you are having uncontrolled diarrhoea associated with bloody poo, pain, fever, or with nausea and vomiting, to exclude infection or other unintended complications.

Unfortunately finding out which foods may affect a person can be 'hit and miss' at times and very much a process of elimination. People will not always experience the same problems.

Some people find it helpful to carry around a small pouch such as a toiletry bag as an 'insurance policy' with some emergency items, such as:

- » Wipes
- » Extra underwear
- » Incontinence pads



# Diarrhoea

Light, bland and easily digested foods may reduce the severity of diarrhoea following treatment for bowel cancer. Cutting down on fibre from wholegrains can slow down the transit of food through the large bowel, especially in the early weeks and months following surgery and radiotherapy.

## tip

**Well-cooked mashed root vegetables, such as squash, pumpkin and carrot may be better tolerated and still provide some useful nutrients.**

For some people, nuts, beans and peas, egg yolk, onions, garlic, cheese, and red meats may increase the risk of diarrhoea. Some dairy products, spicy and hot foods, beer and wine may also increase the frequency of loose bowel movements.

**If you are having problems with diarrhoea, you might find the following foods helpful:**

- » **Egg whites, chicken and white fish**
- » **Jelly sweets, meringue and marshmallows (but keep sugar to a minimum)**
- » **Toast or crackers**
- » **White rice, mashed potatoes, white bread and pasta**
- » **Bananas**

## tip

**Other tips which could be helpful include:**  
Deep breathing exercises and slow, gentle exercise for relaxation such as yoga and tai chi may have some benefits in relieving problems with diarrhoea related to stress and anxiety.

## Medications that may help with diarrhoea include:

Co-phenotrope (Lomotil) Codeine Phosphate (and other opiate based pain killers) can help to slow down the movement of the large bowel. Medicines which contain soluble fibre (e.g. Fibogel and Normacol) can also be helpful. **Always talk to your doctor before taking medicines for diarrhoea.**

If you have had radiotherapy to your bowel, or surgery to remove the right side of your bowel, you may have diarrhoea that is caused by irritation and inflammation of the lining of the bowel. If this is the case, your specialist team or GP can also prescribe other medications to help relieve the symptoms.



### Some people find the following useful:

- » Reduce fibre from wholegrain breads, bran, cereals, nuts and seeds (except linseeds)
- » Avoid skin, pips, seeds and pith from fruit and vegetables
- » Limit fresh and dried fruit to three portions a day and fruit juice to one small glass a day (make up the recommended 'five a day' with vegetables)
- » Avoid foods high in fat, such as chips, fast foods and burgers
- » Stay away from very spicy and hot food
- » Reduce caffeine from tea, coffee, chocolate and fizzy drinks
- » Alcohol can make your bowel motions loose - this doesn't mean you cannot have a drink, but just be aware that the day after you may notice a change in output
- » Some people find that **herbal tea** calms their bowel and that less wind seems to be produced. Camomile, peppermint and fennel teas are each found useful by some people

## Dehydration caused by diarrhoea (with or without vomiting)

The body loses fluid as well as salt and other minerals (electrolytes) with severe diarrhoea. Dehydration can occur, leaving you feeling very tired and unwell. It is important to keep drinking water, little and often, and to replace these lost salts.

The best sources of salt replacement can be found in fresh or tinned **soups and broths**. Other ideas include **Marmite** on toast or plain crackers with a small piece of cheese.

If you are unable to eat because of nausea, or if you become very dehydrated, your GP or pharmacist may recommend using some oral rehydration salts. These contain the correct balance of salts and sugars to help your body re-absorb them quickly.



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