

National Cancer Institute

at the National Institutes of Health

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Managing Chemotherapy Side Effects

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Diarrhea

To order free copies of this fact sheet, please call 1-800-422-6237 (1-800-4-CANCER).

What is diarrhea?

Do you have bowel movements more often than normal? Are they soft, loose or watery? Then you may have diarrhea.

Call your doctor or nurse if:

You feel dizzy

You have a fever of 100.5° F (38° C) or higher

You have diarrhea and cramps for more than a day

Your rectal area is sore or bleeds



"I was afraid to go places without a bathroom close by. My nurse told me about what foods to eat to feel better. She also told me about medicine that I now take when I need to."

Do these things to feel better:

Eat small meals that are easy to digest.

Eat 5 or 6 small meals each day, instead of 3 big meals.

Foods such as bananas, applesauce, white rice, and white toast are easy to digest.

Drink more liquids each day.

Keep in mind that drinking more won't stop the diarrhea, but it will help replace fluids you are losing.

Most people who have diarrhea need to drink 8 to 12 cups of liquid every day.

Clear broth, gelatin, and Pedialyte® are good choices for most people.

Stay away from these foods:

Some foods can make diarrhea worse.

Don't have dairy products, such as milk, cheese, and sour cream.

Don't eat spicy, greasy, or fried foods.

Don't have foods that cause gas, such as broccoli and cabbage.

Don't eat foods that are high in fiber, such as whole-wheat breads, granola, and bran cereals.

Don't eat raw fruits or vegetables. Most canned fruits and vegetables are okay.

Check with your doctor or nurse before taking medicine for diarrhea.

These foods and drinks may help if you have diarrhea:

Soups (clear liquids)	Drinks (clear liquids)	Meals and snacks
Clear broth, such as chicken, vegetable, or beef 	Clear soda, such as ginger ale Cranberry or grape juice Oral rehydration drinks, such as Pedialyte® Tea (without caffeine) Water 	Applesauce Bananas Cottage cheese Crackers Cream of Wheat® or Cream of Rice® cereal Eggs Gelatin (Jell-O®) Meats, such as chicken, fish, or turkey - broiled or baked, without the skin Noodles Oatmeal Peanut butter that is creamy or smooth Potatoes--boiled, without the skin White rice White toast Yogurt (plain or vanilla) Most canned or cooked fruits and vegetables without seeds or skins are easy on your stomach. 

Stay away from these drinks:

Some drinks can make diarrhea worse.

Don't have beer, wine, and other drinks with alcohol in them.

Don't have caffeine drinks like cola, coffee, and black tea.

Questions to ask your doctor or nurse:

1. What problems should I call you about?
2. What medicine is okay for me to take?
3. How much liquid should I drink each day? What are oral rehydration drinks?
4. Can you give me the name of a nutritionist, so I can learn more about what foods to eat?
5. What is a sitz bath? Should I take these?

Clean your rectal area with warm water and a baby-wipe. Keep the area dry. Ask about creams that can help.

Free Services to Learn More

**National Cancer Institute
Cancer Information Service**

Phone: 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)

TTY: 1-800-332-8615

Chat Online: www.cancer.gov/help

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