

How to Manage your Diarrhea

What is cancer-related diarrhea?

Diarrhea is common for people with cancer. It is a loose, watery or unformed stool (poo) that might look like many flakes or pieces. It may cause an urgent need to go to the bathroom and you may not be able to stop yourself from having a bowel movement (going poo). Diarrhea can last for a few hours or become a problem that lasts a long time.

What causes cancer-related diarrhea?

- Cancer treatments
- Some medications, like laxatives and antibiotics
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Infection
- Eating foods that upset your stomach
- Some natural health products and vitamins
- Other medical problems



What can I do to manage my diarrhea?

Take anti-diarrhea medication

Take anti-diarrhea medication if your health care team prescribed it. Follow your doctor and pharmacist's directions about taking anti-diarrhea medication.

Drink a lot liquids

Diarrhea can cause dehydration. Drinking more will stop your diarrhea, but it will not help make up for liquids you lose. Drink liquids slowly and in small amounts during the day. Sports drinks are a good choice.

Change your diet

Eat many small meals and snacks instead of 2 or 3 large meals. Eat slowly, take small bites and chew food well. Remove all skins, peels, membranes and seeds from fruits and vegetables.

Plan for outings

Sometimes diarrhea can cause an urgent need to go to a bathroom. Plan ahead so you can feel more comfortable about leaving home.

Take care of your skin

If your skin is sore, wear cotton underwear with no elastic around the leg holes. Take a sitz bath to help heal your skin, prevent infection and to stay comfortable. You can use a bathtub, large basin or plastic sitz bath from a drug store. Add 1-2 tablespoons of baking soda or 1-2 teaspoons of salt to warm water.

When should I talk to my health care team?

Tell your health care team right away if you have any of these symptoms:

- Feel tired, weak or dizzy
- Chest pains
- Vomiting (throwing up)
- You have little or very dark pee
- You are unable to eat or are afraid to eat
- Blood in your stool (poo)
- Diarrhea that lasts more than 24 hours
- A fever of 38.3° C (100.9°F) or higher at any time or 38°C (100.4°F) or higher for at least one hour



For more information, talk to your health care team or visit www.cancercare.on.ca/symptoms



South West
Regional Cancer Program
in partnership with Cancer Care Ontario



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Information adapted from Cancer Care Ontario's How to Manage Your Symptoms - patient guides.

This is information only and does not replace medical advice. Always ask your health care provider if you have any questions or concerns.