

# Diarrhea

Diarrhea is a symptom that can be caused by many things. For complete relief, all causes of diarrhea must be treated. The treatment varies depending upon the cause. This information will explain some of the many causes of diarrhea and the corresponding treatments.

## Impaction

A severe impaction can cause diarrhea. Impaction is the collection of a large amount of stool (hard or soft) that remains in the colon. Diarrhea occurs when liquid stool in the small bowel seeps around impacted stool in the large bowel. **Do not** take anti-diarrhea medicine because the impaction will only get worse. The treatment for this kind of diarrhea is removal of the impaction. Your nurse will help you if you have an impaction.

## Lactose Intolerance

Diarrhea may occur if your body lacks the enzyme to digest milk and milk products. Milk products are anything made from milk, such as yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese and ice cream. Treat this kind of diarrhea in one of two ways: 1) take Lactaid<sup>®</sup> when eating or drinking milk or milk products; or 2) stop eating or drinking milk products.

## Food Allergies

If you have food allergies, you may get diarrhea from the foods you are allergic to. You should stop eating the foods that cause diarrhea and discuss your food allergies with your doctor.

## Antibiotic Therapy

Antibiotics, medicines prescribed to clear up an infection, may cause diarrhea when these drugs kill the bacteria that normally live in the intestinal lining. Treat this kind of diarrhea by restoring your intestinal lining by:

- Eating two servings of yogurt (i.e., DanActive<sup>®</sup>) per day that contain acidophilus or live cultures. Avoid yogurts that promote gut motility (i.e. Activia<sup>®</sup> or those containing Bifidus Regularis.
- Drinking buttermilk
- Taking acidophilus or lactobacillus in pill form, available from the pharmacy or health food store

Ask your pharmacist about over-the-counter products that can help with diarrhea that is caused by antibiotics.

## Radiation Therapy

Radiation therapy to the gastrointestinal (GI) tract will change the lining of your colon – causing diarrhea. Treat this diarrhea with loperamide (brand name Imodium<sup>®</sup>, available with out a prescription) or Lomotil<sup>®</sup> (prescription only) or both. These medications will slow down the passage of contents through the intestine. Notify your doctor if these medications do not give you relief. Also, a low-fiber diet will help relieve this type of diarrhea. Ask your doctor for a consultation with a dietitian to help you with your diet.

For more information, refer to the patient education document “Bowel Management for Frequent Stooling.”

## Cancer Surgery

Having surgery to remove part of your intestine may cause you to have frequent stools because stool now moves more quickly through your intestine. Often, these stools are soft and formed – not liquid stools.

Take Imodium or Lomotil at the time **you are advised to do so by your doctor or nurse**. Imodium or Lomotil will provide immediate relief after surgery. Medicinal fiber [psyllium (Metamucil<sup>®</sup>) or methylcellulose (Citrucel<sup>®</sup>)], taken with very litte water (about 2 ounces) is used to slow down the movement in the GI tract. The fiber absorbs the excess fluid like a sponge. When you take an appropriate amount of psyllium, other medicines may not be needed. For more information, refer to the patient education document “Bowel Management for Frequent Stooling.” As you increase the dose of psyllium, decrease the dosage of Imodium or Lomotil. For more information on fiber, refer to the patient education document “Medicinal Fiber.” If you do not have these, ask you nurse for a copy.

Major causes of frequent stooling after surgery include highly spiced foods, deep fried foods, and hot liquids. The BRAT diet is very helpful in slowing GI transit. The BRAT diet includes: bananas, boiled white rice, applesauce and dry toast.

## Chemotherapy

Certain types of chemotherapy drugs cause diarrhea for a brief time. Use the specific guidelines from your doctor to control diarrhea. If you do not receive specific instructions, you may take Imodium to control diarrhea **only** if you do not have a fever. You may take Imodium as needed, not to exceed 8 tablets per day or 16 mg per day (read the label on the package). **Do not** take anything else for your diarrhea, such as Kaopectate<sup>®</sup> or Pepto-Bismol<sup>®</sup>, unless your doctor says it is okay, because these medications can mask a fever and/or affect your platelet function. If you continue to have diarrhea, call your doctor for additional help.

## Chemotherapy Drugs That Cause Diarrhea

- 5-azacitidine
- 5-FU/Leucovorin
- Adriamycin<sup>®</sup> (Doxorubicin)
- Camptosar<sup>®</sup> (Irinotecan)
- Cytosine Arabinoside
- Daunorubicin
- High dose Cisplatin, Oxaliplatin, Paclitaxel and Cyclophosphamide
- Hycamtin<sup>®</sup> (Topotecan)
- Hydrea<sup>®</sup> (Hydroxyurea)
- Methotrexate
- Nitrosureas
- Thioguanine

If you have been taking fiber prior to taking a chemotherapy drug that causes diarrhea, stop taking the fiber until after you finished your chemotherapy.

## Medications

The following medications can cause diarrhea. Ask your doctor or nurse before taking these.

- Alcohol
- Antacids with magnesium base
- Aldomet<sup>®</sup> (Methyldopa)
- Caffeine
- Cytotec<sup>®</sup> (Misoprostol)
- Enteral nutrition supplements
- Laxatives
- Non-steroidal drugs
- Reglan<sup>®</sup> (Metoclopramide)
- Theophylline

## Infections and Parasites

Some bacteria and certain types of parasites can cause diarrhea. Medication may be an appropriate treatment. Your doctor may request a stool specimen in order to prescribe the correct medication. If you are diagnosed with a clostridium difficile infection, please ask for the patient education document “Clostridium Difficile-Associated Diarrhea.”

## Symptom Therapy

Ask your doctor before taking any laxatives, magnesium supplements and magnesium-based antacids because they can cause diarrhea.

## Other Causes

The following problems can also cause diarrhea:

- Gastroenteritis - inflammation of the stomach
- Diverticulitis - inflammation of areas in the intestine
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Hot liquids and spicy and high fat foods increase activity in the GI tract
- Adding medicinal fiber too fast to the diet will increase diarrhea, cramping and bloating.

To prevent these problems, introduce medicinal fiber in 1 teaspoon increments every five days. This is described in the patient education document “Bowel Management for Frequent Stooling.”

## Unknown Causes

If you have diarrhea and don't know why, talk to your doctor or nurse. Your treatment will vary depending on the **cause** of the problem. It is important to treat the causes, **not** the symptom.