

Diarrhea

Medical Management

Diarrhea can be a side effect of some chemotherapy and radiation therapy treatments. Diarrhea may require medication to manage, but check with your doctor or nurse before you self-treat with over-the-counter antidiarrheal products. Please talk to your doctor or nurse for additional information about medical management of diarrhea if you have questions about this issue.

Using Nutrition to Help Yourself

If you have diarrhea, you can lessen the severity of this symptom by choosing the right food, avoiding things that may worsen diarrhea, and carefully planning your eating schedule.

Nutrition Tips for Diarrhea

- Whenever possible, work with your doctor, nurse, or dietitian to prevent diarrhea before it occurs. If medication is prescribed, follow the instructions exactly.
- Nibble on little bits of food all day instead of having large meals. Too much food in the digestive tract at once will worsen diarrhea.
- Sip liquids in small amounts, slowly and constantly all day.
- Avoid drinking too much at once.
- Sip most of your liquids between meals rather than with meals.
- Try liquids at room temperature, which may be easier to tolerate.
- If possible, lie down after eating to slow the passage of food through your digestive tract.
- Experiment with food temperature to determine if warm, cool, or room temperature works better for you.
- Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of noncaffeinated liquid each day to prevent dehydration.

What to Eat and Drink

- Eat food rich in soluble fiber, including oatmeal, white rice, bananas, apple sauce, canned fruit without the skins, plain white toast, plain pasta noodles, cream of rice cereal, and unsweetened graham crackers.
- Try bland, warm food, such as oatmeal, cream of wheat, or soup.
- Nibble on salty food, such as crackers and pretzels, to replace lost sodium.

- Try nonacidic juices, such as apricot nectar, peach nectar, or pear nectar. If full strength juice worsens diarrhea, try sipping a mixture of one-half



- juice and one-half water instead.
- Eat a little yogurt every day. Yogurt contains healthy bacteria, called probiotics, which will help your body digest food better.
- If you use a sport drink such as Gatorade to replace lost fluids and electrolytes, use one that contains no more than 50 calories per serving and that does not contain artificial sweeteners.
- Sip plain broth or bouillon, flat soda, and water.
- Try white rice prepared with extra liquid. You can prepare 1 cup of white rice with 6 to 7 cups of water and a teaspoon of salt. Slowly sip and eat this mixture. Skip the salt if you are on a low sodium diet.

What to Avoid

- Food high in insoluble fiber, including raw vegetables and fruit, whole wheat or wheat bran, seeds, nuts, popcorn, beans, and peas.
- High-fat, greasy, or spicy food, such as french fries or fried meats, bacon, pizza, mayonnaise, cheeses, rich desserts, doughnuts, pastries, potato chips, gravies, and high-fat dressings.
- Gas-producing food, including beans, cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and cauliflower; onions, corn, peas, cucumbers, and peppers; and some fruit, such as cantaloupe and other types of melon, and apricots, prunes, and raw apples.
- High-fat dairy, such as whole milk, ice cream, and cheese, and caffeine if these worsen diarrhea.
- Sugar substitutes, such as Nutrasweet, Splenda, mannitol, and sorbitol.
- Wheat bran and high-fiber whole wheat products.
- Very hot and very cold food; extreme temperatures may worsen diarrhea.
- Tobacco (cigarettes, pipe, or chewing tobacco) and alcohol.