
Diarrhea

What is diarrhea?

Diarrhea is a common side effect in people receiving cancer treatment. It occurs when water in the intestines does not absorb back into the body and results in loose, watery stools and stomach cramps. It can lead to dehydration and weight loss if it is prolonged.

What are some causes?

Causes of diarrhea may include cancer treatments, infections, stress, anxiety, and the cancer itself. Not all chemotherapy drugs cause diarrhea, but some may affect the cells in your intestinal lining which may result in diarrhea. Radiation therapy to the abdominal or pelvic area can also cause diarrhea depending on the dosage. Sometimes it may continue for weeks or months after treatment.

Cancer that requires surgery to remove parts of the intestine might alter the intestines' ability to absorb nutrients which may lead to diarrhea. Some cancer treatments may make you more at risk to infections which also can cause diarrhea. Other causes can be stress, anxiety and the cancer itself.

What else can you do?

Eat small snacks several times daily instead of three large meals

- Choose foods to replace the electrolytes lost in diarrhea such as
 - bananas, potatoes, apricots, sports drinks such as Gatorade® or Powerade®
 - Choose low fiber foods like white rice, noodles, crackers, applesauce, bananas, or white bread or toast
- Stay hydrated:
 - Drink plenty of fluids to help replace the amount lost, but don't drink too much at a time
 - Drink clear liquids such as water, apple juice, clear broth, or ice pops
 - Avoid caffeine (cola, tea, coffee) and alcohol
 - Drink at least one cup (8 oz) fluid after each episode of diarrhea

These foods may be hard to digest or irritate the intestines and can be avoided until the diarrhea resolves:

- Greasy, fried, high fat foods
- Hot and spicy foods
- Very hot or very cold foods
- Milk and milk products
- Very sweet drinks and desserts such as pastries, cake, cookies, candies



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- Sugar substitutes
 - Acidic juices such as tomato juice, citrus juices, and carbonated drinks
 - High fiber foods such as raw fruits/vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans, bran cereals, oatmeal, brown rice, dried fruit
 - Gas-producing foods such as broccoli, cauliflower, corn, peas, cabbage, onions

Some foods that may be helpful and well tolerated:

- Hard boiled eggs
- Smooth peanut butter on white bread or crackers
- Chicken, turkey or roast beef sandwiches
- Mashed potatoes
- Yogurt
- Low-fat cottage cheese

For any nutrition questions, please contact your VA Dietitian:

Name: _____

Phone: _____