

Eating Tips for People with Diarrhea

For patients who have diarrhea during cancer treatment

Read this resource to learn:

- When to change your diet
- What diet changes to make
- What foods to eat and what foods to avoid



When to change your diet

This pamphlet can help improve your diarrhea, cramping or gas. Diarrhea is loose, watery bowel movements (poo).

Your diarrhea, cramping or gas may be from:

- radiation therapy that focuses on your stomach, pelvis or back
- some chemotherapy medicines
- immunotherapy treatment
- other conditions, for example, other medicines or recent surgery

Eating well may seem hard when you have diarrhea. But a balanced diet is important because your body needs many nutrients. Nutrients are the things in food that give us energy and build muscle.

Nutrients help:

- maintain weight
- repair body tissues
- keep your immune system strong (your body's system for fighting infections)

Your doctor, nurse or radiation therapist may suggest medicines like Imodium or Lomotil to control your diarrhea. To help control your diarrhea, you can also:

- Eat 5 or 6 small meals each day instead of 3 large meals. Smaller meals are easier to digest.
- Choose foods and drinks suggested in this pamphlet.

Should I change my diet before diarrhea starts?

No. Your diarrhea is from your cancer treatment. Only make changes to your diet if you have:

- cramps
- your bowel movements come more often
- your bowel movements are softer or liquid

Making diet changes too soon can cause constipation. Constipation means you are having less bowel movements than is normal for you.

Diarrhea from your cancer treatment may occur at different times. Diarrhea from radiation therapy treatment may start as early as 2 weeks into treatment. Diarrhea from radiation therapy can last until a couple weeks after treatment has finished as well.

Diarrhea from chemotherapy can occur during or after each course of treatment is completed. Diarrhea from chemotherapy may last for a few days. Your diarrhea may be worse if you have chemotherapy and radiation therapy together.

When can I go back to my usual diet?

You can go back to your usual diet when:

- your diarrhea is better
- your treatment is over and your diarrhea is better
- you are using less diarrhea medicines

What diet changes to make if you have diarrhea

A low fibre diet can help you manage your diarrhea, cramps and gas. A diet low in fat, lactose (a sugar found in milk products), caffeine and spices may also help. The best diet for you depends on what you usually eat.

Your diet will also depend on how your body reacts to foods and drinks. Talk to your health care team about a diet that is right for you. Below outlines foods for a low fibre, fat, spice, lactose (found in milk) and caffeine diet.

Fibre

To reduce fibre in your diet, you can:

1. Choose breads, cereals, crackers and other grain products made with white flour.
2. Avoid nuts, seeds, dried beans and peas.
3. Eat fewer fruits and vegetables each day.
4. Choose juices instead of fruits and vegetables.



5. Eat smaller portions of all fruits and vegetables at one time. For example, have 1/2 piece instead of 1 whole piece of fruit.
6. Avoid dried fruits such as prunes, including prune juice, raisins and apricots. Avoid seedy fruits such as berries and kiwi fruit.

Fat

To reduce fat in your diet, you can:



1. Choose lean meats, poultry, fish and vegetables that are baked, broiled, steamed or stir-fried. Avoid foods that are deep-fried or served in creamy sauces.
2. Use butter, margarine, cream cheese or peanut butter in small amounts, for example 1 – 2 teaspoons per meal.
3. Use low-fat milk, yogurt or cottage cheese. Look for milk, yogurt or cheese that is 2% M.F. (milk fat) or less. Use lower fat hard cheeses that are 20% M.F. or less.

Spices

Most herbs and spices can be used to add flavour to foods. Avoid spicy foods made with curry, chili or hot pepper sauce. These spices may make diarrhea worse.



Milk Products

Lactose is the natural sugar found in milk products.

To reduce lactose in your diet, you can:



1. Try low lactose products such as Lactaid or Lacteeze milk, aged cheeses or yogurt. If you choose to have regular milk, cheese or yogurt, take Lactaid tablets or drops to help make these foods easier to digest. Lactaid tablets or drops are available in drug stores.
2. Eat or drink smaller amounts of milk products at one time. For example, have 1/2 cup (120 ml/millilitres) of milk instead of 1 cup (240 ml). Or have 1/3 cup (80 ml) sherbet instead of 1/2 cup (120 ml).

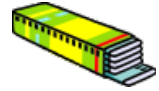
Caffeine

To reduce the caffeine in your diet, drink less regular coffee, tea, colas or chocolate drinks. Try decaffeinated coffee, tea and colas, hot water with lemon or honey, herbal tea like chamomile or apple cinnamon.



Sugar Alcohols

Sugar alcohols such as xylitol, mannitol, sorbitol and isomalt are used as sweeteners. They can be found in sugar-free products such as chewing gums, candies, cough drops, cookies, bars and drinks. Limit products with sugar alcohols because they cause gas and diarrhea.



Do not stop your medicines if your medicine contains any of these sugar alcohols. Talk to your doctor about your medicines.

Fluids

Diarrhea causes you to lose fluid. This can lead to dehydration (when your body does not have enough fluids). Replace lost fluids to prevent dehydration. Drink at least 8 to 10 cups (2 to 2.5 litres) of fluids a day. Try drinking small amounts throughout the day, such as 1/2 cup (120 ml) of water a time. Some fluids can cause diarrhea or make it worse. Below is a list of fluids to drink and fluids to avoid.

Clear fluids are the best choice. Clear fluids leave little or no food in your digestive tract (intestines and stomach). The digestive tract is the part of your body that breaks down food. Once food is broken down, your body can absorb the food and create energy. Clear fluids include clear liquids and some liquids with colour.

Fluids to drink:

- Water
- Juices but avoid prune juice
- Fruit drinks such as Tang, Gatorade
- Caffeine-free soft drinks such as Ginger Ale, Sprite
- Weak tea or caffeine-free tea or coffee
- Clear soups such as beef, chicken or vegetable broth
- Jell-O
- Popsicles

Fluids to avoid:

- Drinks with caffeine such as coffee, strong tea or colas
- Milk products such as milk, pudding, ice cream, cream soups, Carnation Breakfast Essentials
- Nutritional supplements such as Ensure or Boost. These drinks are low in lactose but they are rich and should be taken in small amounts. Drink only 1/3 cup (80 ml) to 1/2 cup (120 ml) at one time. Or mix 1/4 cup (60 ml) of water with 1/4 cup (60 ml) Ensure. Mixing water into drinks or drinking small portions will prevent your diarrhea from becoming worse.

Drinking fluids at room temperature may help reduce diarrhea or cramping. Avoid very hot or very cold fluids. If you have severe diarrhea, mix juices or fruit drinks with an equal amount of water. See the next page for more information.

What to do if your diarrhea is severe

Severe diarrhea is bowel movements that are very loose or watery. With severe diarrhea, you may need to go to the bathroom often during the day and night. If you have severe diarrhea, follow the instructions below:

1. Call your doctor or nurse right away
2. Drink only clear fluids for 12 to 24 hours
3. As the diarrhea gets better, add solid foods to your diet over a few days.

Follow the steps below to add solid foods back into your diet:

1. Add low fibre, low fat, starchy foods such as soda crackers, white toast, English muffins, plain bagel, breadsticks, steamed rice, white potato (no skin), noodles in broth.
2. Add lean meats, poultry or fish cooked without added fats.
3. Add low lactose fluids or soft foods such as Lactaid milk, Lacteeze milk or yogurt, baked custard, lactose free puddings.
4. Add low fibre fruits and vegetables such as canned mandarin oranges, applesauce and cooked green beans.

What foods to eat and what foods to avoid

Below are lists of foods to eat when you have diarrhea and foods to avoid. Use these lists to help control your diarrhea.

Grains	
Grains to eat when you have diarrhea	Grains to avoid when you have diarrhea
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cornflakes, • Crispix, • Cream of wheat • oatmeal • Rice Krispies • Special K • English muffin • French stick • hamburger bun • plain bagel • white bread • white pasta • white rice • bread sticks • melba toast • rice crackers • Ritz • pretzels • saltines • Angel Food or sponge cake • arrowroots • digestives • oatmeal cookies • social teas • vanilla wafers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Bran • Bran Flakes • Cheerios • Cornbran • Granola • Mueslix • Oatbran • Red River • Shredded Wheat • barley • brown rice • wild rice • rye • whole wheat • whole wheat pasta • pumpernickel or cracked wheat breads • crackers with nuts or seeds • whole grain crackers like Ryvita • corn chips • nacho chips • bagels with seeds • baked goods with dried fruit or nuts, like carrot cake or fig bars

Milk Products

<p>✓ Milk products to eat when you have diarrhea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lactose Free Milk such as Lactaid, Lacteeze or soy milk • Yogurt with 2% M.F. or less; plain, vanilla, cappuccino or peach • Cheese such as hard cheeses with 20% M.F. or less • Desserts such as sherbet, pudding or custards that are baked or made with lactose reduced milk 	<p>✗Milk products to avoid when you have diarrhea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milk such as regular white or chocolate milk • Yogurt with seeds, like raspberry or strawberry or yogurts made with higher than 2% M.F. • Cheese such as cheese with higher fat like Camembert or cheese with seeds like caraway • Desserts such as ice cream, regular puddings and custard
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Vegetables

Cooked vegetables are easier for you to digest than raw vegetables. Limit your vegetable serving size to 1/2 piece or 1/3 to 1/2 cups at one time.

<p>✓ Vegetables to eat when you have diarrhea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alfalfa sprouts • asparagus tips • carrots • celery • green or yellow beans • iceberg lettuce • mushrooms • green or red peppers • peeled white potatoes • pumpkin • tomato sauce • peeled and seeded: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ tomato ▪ cucumber ▪ eggplant ▪ zucchini 	<p>✗ Vegetables to avoid when you have diarrhea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • artichokes • beets • broccoli • Brussel sprouts, • cabbage* • cauliflower • corn • kohlrabi • okra • onions* • parsnip • peas • spinach • sweet potato • turnip • winter squash <p>* These vegetables are low in fibre but may causes gas</p>
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Fruits

Peeled fruits are easier for you to digest. Limit your fruit serving size to 1/2 piece or 1/3 to 1/2 cup at one time.

✓ Fruits to eat when you have diarrhea	✗Fruits to avoid when you have diarrhea
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • apple • apple sauce • apricots • banana • cherries • peaches • nectarine • pineapple • grapes (10 to 12) • mango • plum • honeydew • cantaloupe • watermelon • orange • grapefruit segments without the membranes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all berries • coconut • fruit cocktail • kiwi • pear • papaya • persimmon • pomegranate • rhubarb • dried fruit such as raisins, apricots, dates or figs

Meat and meat alternatives

Prepare lean meats with a low fat cooking method such as baked or broiled.

✓ Meat and meat alternatives to eat when you have diarrhea	✗Meat and meat alternatives to avoid when you have diarrhea
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • beef • pork • lamb • chicken • turkey • fish • seafood • eggs • smooth peanut butter (small amounts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • canned fish packed in oil • nuts • seeds • chunky peanut butter • dried beans and peas like kidney beans, lentils and chick peas

Sample Meal Plan:

Below outlines a sample meal plan for you. Use the sample meal plan to guide your meals during diarrhea. Talk to your health care team for help.

Breakfast:	Rice Krispies with 1/2 banana sliced and lactose free milk decaffeinated coffee
Snack:	plain oatmeal muffin diluted fruit juice
Lunch:	chicken noodle soup 1/2 turkey sandwich on white bread small peeled apple Lactaid milk
Snack:	plain cookies decaffeinated tea
Supper:	lean roast beef with small amount gravy mashed potatoes cooked baby carrots water
Snack:	*lactose free pudding diluted juice

*To make lactose free pudding: add Lactaid or Lacteeze milk to an instant pudding mix that does not contain milk, milk solids, skim milk powder or whey in the list of ingredients.

This document is a general overview. For more information about your care, ask a member of your health care team to refer you to a registered dietitian.

Other Helpful Resources at the Princess Margaret Patient and Family Library

- “Goes Down Easy: Recipes to help you cope with the challenge of eating during cancer treatment” cookbook

Helpful Online Resources

To search online for other helpful resources go to

www.theprincessmargaret.ca:

- Click on “Patients and Families” on the blue menu bar
- Scroll down and click on “Search the Library”

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