

Diarrhea

Note: My NM Care corner is not intended to replace clinical care or management by a healthcare provider. If you have a medical emergency, please contact your healthcare provider.

Note: If you are experiencing severe diarrhea, inform your doctor.

Diarrhea is a common side effect that causes more frequent bowel movements and loose, watery stools. These bowel movements are sometimes (but not always) accompanied by abdominal cramps. Diarrhea happens because your body is not absorbing enough water from your food.

Diarrhea is most often caused by chemotherapy or other medications, but occasionally can result from an infection. Individuals with pancreatic cancer may experience diarrhea when their pancreas is not working properly.

Mild diarrhea usually doesn't result in serious problems, though it can be uncomfortable. More significant diarrhea, however, can cause dehydration and eventually lead to more serious health problems. It's best to prevent diarrhea or treat it as soon as it develops.

Self-care Strategies

Consider these options to help you manage mild diarrhea:

- Stay hydrated! Drink 8-10 8-ounce glasses of fluids a day.
 - Sip fluids slowly, throughout the entire day.
 - Try to add fluids that are high in sodium ("salty") or high in potassium to help your body retain fluids.
 - Warm or "room-temperature" fluids may be better than cold fluids.
 - Read this list of fluid sources to try, and some to avoid:

Drink this:	NOT this:
Water	Milk or milk products
Apple juice	Alcohol
Clear broths or soups	Caffeine
Popsicles	
Gelatin	
Ice chips	
Sports drinks like Gatorade or Powerade	

- Eat small, frequent meals and choose foods that are very easy to digest such as bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast. Your doctor may recommend a low-residue diet, which includes low-fiber foods.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, dairy, fat, fiber, orange juice, prune juice, and spicy foods.
- Avoid medicines such as laxatives, stool softeners, and metoclopramide (Reglan). Metoclopramide is used to prevent nausea and vomiting from chemotherapy but can lead to looser stools at times.

How Your Care Team Can Help

- If you experience a change in your bowel movements, talk with your care team to explore the best ways to manage it. Ask if you need medicines to prevent diarrhea such as loperamide (Imodium) or the prescription diphenoxylate/atropine (Lomotil).

- Occasionally diarrhea can be caused by an infection, which can be identified by your care team and treated with antibiotics.
- If diarrhea is caused by the pancreas not working well (which occurs in some patients with pancreatic cancer), replacing pancreatic enzymes might help.
- If diarrhea is severe, your care team may provide intravenous (IV) fluids. They may also review your schedule or dose of chemotherapy.

Notes: _____
