

Diarrhea and Chemotherapy

What Is Diarrhea?

Diarrhea is the passage of frequent stool, unformed or liquid in consistency, through either the body's natural (anus) or diverted (ostomy) opening. Diarrhea is a symptom, rather than a disease, often produced or induced in response to another condition or treatment (i.e. cancer treatments such as chemotherapy or radiation). Diarrhea is sometimes referred to as "the runs" or "the trots."

- Other possible causes of diarrhea include:
- Radiation to abdomen or pelvis
- Anxiety or stress
- Surgery on the small or large bowel or pelvis
- Infection
- Antibiotics, Antacids containing magnesium, anti-nausea medicines, laxatives, or stool softeners
- Lactose Intolerance
- Irritable/inflammatory bowel syndrome
- Malnutrition

How to Minimize or Avoid Chemotherapy-Induced Diarrhea:

Dietary

- Drink plenty of clear fluids (8-10 glasses per day). Examples: Gatorade®, broth, Jello®, water, etc.
- Eat small amounts of soft bland low fiber foods frequently. Examples: banana, rice, noodles, white bread, skinned chicken, turkey or mild white fish.
- Avoid foods such as:
- Greasy, fatty, or fried foods.
- Raw vegetables or fruits.
- Strong spices.
- Whole grains breads and cereals, nuts, and popcorn.
- Gas forming foods & beverages (beans, cabbage, carbonated beverages).
- Lactose-containing products, supplements, or alcohol.
- Limit foods and beverages with caffeine and beverages extremely hot or cold.

Over-the-counter medication for diarrhea:

- Please read label to make sure you can take this medication:
- Loperamide (Imodium®)
- Kaopectate®II caplets
- Maalox®anti-Diarrheal caplets
- Pepto® Diarrhea control (follow instructions on container)
- Avoid: herbal supplements (milk thistle, cayenne, ginseng, saw palmetto, and others).

Skin Care:

- Clean skin around anus gently with warm water and soft cloth then dry gently and completely.
- May apply a barrier cream (such as Desitin®) to irritated skin.
- Allow the irritated skin to be exposed to open air as much as possible.

Drugs That May Be Prescribed by Your Doctor for Diarrhea:

(These drugs are available only by prescription)

- Diphenoxylate - atropine sulfate (Lomotil®)
- Tincture of opium

When to Contact Your Doctor or Health Care Provider:

- Fever 100.5F (38C) or higher.
- Moderate to severe abdominal cramping/pain/straining/bloating.
- Dizziness.
- Dark (concentrated) urine.
- Dry mouth and skin.
- Black stools or blood in stools.
- Sudden rapid or irregular heartbeat.
- If dietary measures and medication do not decrease the diarrhea.

Note: We strongly encourage you to talk with your health care professional about your specific medical condition and treatments. The information contained in this website is meant to be helpful and educational, but is not a substitute for medical advice.