

## Nutrition and Dietetics

# Diet advice for people having radiotherapy to the pelvis area

Producing gas (farting, flatulence, or wind) is a normal part of the digestion process. Everyone has gas in their large bowel, and this is normal.

A build-up of gas in your bowel can be uncomfortable. It could also affect the accuracy of your radiotherapy by interfering with the treatment field.

## Where gas in your large bowel comes from

The gas in your large bowel comes from two main sources:

- swallowed air
- the breakdown of undigested fibre and carbohydrate by bacteria in your large bowel

Most of the gas in your digestive tract comes from swallowing air whilst you eat or drink. Some of this air leaves the stomach by burping or belching. The rest passes through your bowel and out of your anus.

How often you pass wind depends on the foods you eat and your digestion.

Continue with your usual eating habits if:

- you do not have any symptoms like farting, diarrhoea, weight loss or constipation
- you do not have interruptions to your treatment



## Patient Information

### **To reduce the amount of air you swallow:**

#### **Do:**

- ✓ eat food slowly and do not rush whilst eating
- ✓ chew food well and with your mouth closed Avoid gulping fluids and sucking through a straw. Wherever possible drink from a glass or cup.
- ✓ try drinking lukewarm instead of hot drinks as air is swallowed when hot drinks are sipped

#### **Don't:**

- × do not drink fizzy drinks, carbonated water and beer
- × do not chew gum
- × do not gulp fluids or use a straw - drink from a glass or cup

### **To reduce the wind produced in your large bowel:**

#### **Do:**

- eat small meals, often
- keep a food and symptom diary – this will help you find foods that make you fart more
- take peppermint oil capsules (you can buy these over-the-counter or on prescription), drink peppermint tea,
- gentle exercise regularly – this'll help move any trapped wind

Live yogurts like probiotics may help with wind during radiotherapy. If you are also having chemotherapy, speak to a dietitian or doctor for advice on eating live yoghurts.

#### **Don't:**

- do not fast or leave long gaps between your meals.
- do not eat too many foods that make you pass wind – these can include:
  - brussell sprouts
  - cabbage
  - cauliflower

## Patient Information

- radish
- spinach, beans, peas and onions
- beans, pulses, sweetcorn, lentils and nuts
- beer, lager and fizzy drinks
- artificial sweeteners that contain xylitol, sorbitol and mannitol

## Constipation

Constipation also causes wind and bloating.

Poo regularly so gas doesn't stay trapped in your bowel. You may need medicine if you get constipated frequently.

Medicines used to treat constipation, such as lactulose, may cause wind.

Speak to your doctor if you have any worries about your medicines. They can review the tablets you are taking and consider other options.

## Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea is where you pass looser or more frequent poo than is normal for you. Radiotherapy to the pelvic area can cause diarrhoea.

## If you have diarrhoea:

### Do:

✓

- ✓ Cut down spicy foods like chilli, cayenne, jalapeno, mustard and black pepper.
- ✓ When you have diarrhoea, Eat foods like:
  - white bread
  - rice krispies, rice puffs, cornflakes
  - boiled rice
  - rice noodles
  - boiled potatoes

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- chicken
- fish
- eggs
- softly cooked vegetables and canned fruits
- ✓ Eat 5 to 6 small meals
- ✓ Eat more soluble fibre. Soluble fibre helps to thicken your stools. Foods with soluble fibre include:
  - white rice
  - apples and pears without skin
  - apple sauce
  - oatmeal
  - smooth peanut butter and
  - ripe banana
- ✓ Drink fluids to help replace the fluids lost from diarrhoea. Aim for at least 10 to 12 drinks per day.

### **Don't:**

- × do not eat spicy foods (chilli, cayenne, jalapeno, mustard, black pepper)
- × do not drink alcohol and caffeine
- × do not eat foods high in insoluble fibre such as:
  - wholegrain cereals and wholemeal bread
  - bran, nuts, seeds
  - raw vegetables and fruits with skin

Speak to your radiographer or doctor if your diarrhoea does not settle. They will consider prescribing tablets to help control it. It's important to manage diarrhoea during treatment to avoid weight loss and treatment interruptions.

## **After radiotherapy**

Reintroduce foods back into your diet gradually once you finish radiotherapy.

## Patient Information

### **Ask your radiographers to refer you to Macmillan dietitians for further advice if:**

- this advice has not helped you to reduce wind or manage loose stools
- you are losing weight whilst on radiotherapy

### **Local dietetics departments contact details**

Coventry Dietitians	024 7696 6161
Nuneaton Dietitians	024 7686 5098
Redditch and Bromsgrove Dietitians	015 2751 2043
Warwick Dietitians	019 2649 5321 extension 4258

This information has been produced by Coventry Macmillan Dietitians, University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire NHS Trust.

### **More information**

Abdominal or pelvic radiotherapy – [www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

Pelvic radiotherapy – [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

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## Patient Information

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