

Nutrition and Dietetics

Diet and cancer care - diarrhoea

This information is part of a series of suggestions to help relieve the symptoms caused by cancer or its treatment and enable you to eat.

Diarrhoea is when your bowel movements become more frequent and less formed. Diarrhoea may occur as a result of an infection or as a side effect of your treatment. Stressful situations or increased anxiety may also affect your bowels.

Diarrhoea is a symptom and can be acute (lasting 2-3 days) or chronic (long term). It is important to identify the reason for the diarrhoea, please discuss your symptoms with a doctor. A once daily stool, no matter how soft, is not diarrhoea. There are medications to help control or stop diarrhoea.

Acute diarrhoea

- You need to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Try small regular sips of squash, diluted fruit juice, or soup. Aim for at least 8-10 cups a day. Avoid drinking alcohol as it can stop your body reabsorbing water in the bowel.
- Try to eat as often as you can. Have small frequent meals and snacks rather than large meals.
- Eat as varied a diet as possible; there is very little evidence to suggest you should avoid particular foods. Limiting your diet can result in an insufficient intake of the nutrients your body needs and may slow down recovery.
- Try to avoid artificial sweeteners such as mannitol, sorbitol and xylitol.



Patient Information

These can have a laxative effect and make diarrhoea worse.

- Foods that may help ease diarrhoea are white bread, pasta, boiled rice, marshmallows, ripe bananas, porridge, smooth peanut butter, oatmeal, and instant mashed potato.
- Certain foods are thought to be irritants to your gut and so it may be worth trying to limit these:
 - caffeine containing drinks such as coffee, tea and cola
 - pure fruit juice, try diluting with water
 - spicy or highly seasoned foods
 - limit or avoid sugar free drinks
- If diarrhoea does not settle, speak to your doctor who may prescribe some antidiarrheal medication.

Chronic diarrhoea

Should the diarrhoea persist despite investigations and medications, it may be necessary to try a different diet to help relieve your symptoms. Please ask your doctor or nurse if you can see a dietitian who can assist you in identifying problem foods whilst ensuring your diet remains well balanced.

Local dietetic department contact details:

Coventry Dietitians	024 7696 6161
Nuneaton Dietitians	024 7686 5098
Redditch and Bromsgrove Dietitians	01527 512043
Warwick Dietitians	01926 495321 extension 4258

Further information on diet and cancer is also available from:

Macmillan Cancer Support	www.macmillan.org.uk
World Cancer Research Fund	www.wcrf-uk.org
Cancer Research UK	www.cancerresearchuk.org

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

Patient Information

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 6161 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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