
Diarrhea

Diarrhea is a common side effect in people receiving cancer treatment. It occurs when foods and liquids in the intestines are not absorbed well by the body and results in loose, watery stools and stomach cramps. It can lead to dehydration and weight loss and can also cause a break in your treatment.

Here are some ways to help you cope with diarrhea:

- Eat 5 or 6 small meals daily instead of 3 large meals.
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.

When you have diarrhea try these foods:

- White rice, plain white bread or toast, crackers, oatmeal, grits, applesauce, bananas, potatoes without skin, eggs (cooked without or with only a small amount of fat), peanut butter, lean meats, low-fat yogurt, cheese, if tolerated (some people experience temporary lactose-intolerance)

Avoid these foods until your symptoms have resolved:

- Whole grains (including whole grain bread, brown rice), leafy greens, raw vegetables, dried fruit, nuts and seeds, fried or greasy foods, spicy foods, sugar-sweetened beverages, desserts, juice, dairy products, sugar substitutes, sugar-free gum or candies containing sorbitol, alcohol, caffeine

To prevent dehydration, be sure to:

- Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day – most people need a minimum of 8 glasses, plus any fluids that you are losing. For a personalized fluid goal, contact your dietitian.
 - All non-caffeinated fluids count: broth, Jell-O, juice, pudding, soups, herbal tea, and water.
- Sip fluids slowly throughout the day (try not to drink too much too quickly).
- Drink room-temperature fluids.
- Avoid consuming caffeine (coffee, black/green/white tea, colas, energy drinks).
- Limit or avoid beverages containing high fructose corn syrup (such as soda, some fruit juices, and energy drinks).

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- If you are having severe diarrhea (more than 4 liquid stools/day) you may try an electrolyte-containing beverage such as the following:
 - 32 oz. Gatorade G2 mixed with 1/2 teaspoon of salt
 - 2 cups chicken broth + 2 cups water + 2 tablespoons sugar
 - 2 1/2 cups tomato juice + 1 1/2 cups water
 - 1/2 cup dry baby rice cereal + 2 cups water + 1/4 teaspoon salt
 - 4 cups water + 3/4 teaspoon salt + 6 teaspoons sugar (optional: Crystal Light to flavor)

For further questions, please contact your VA Registered Dietitian.