

What is cancer-related diarrhea?

Diarrhea is loose, watery or unformed stool (poo) that might look like many little flakes or pieces. Individuals can have 3 or 4 watery bowel movements a day. Diarrhea may cause an urgent need to go to the bathroom and you may not be able to stop yourself from having a bowel movement (going poo).

What can I do to manage diarrhea?

1. Take anti-diarrhea medication

Be safe when taking anti-diarrhea:

- Check with your pharmacist before taking over-the-counter medication that has bismuth subsalicylate (like Pepto Bismol) or loperamide (like Imodium), to make sure it is safe for you to use
- Some medications, like metoclopramide, domperidone and antacids with magnesium, can make your diarrhea worse. Stop taking them while you have diarrhea, unless your doctor has told you it is ok
- Some herbal medicines and natural health products like saw palmetto, ginseng, milk thistle, plantago seed, and aloe may make your diarrhea worse

2. Drink lots of fluids

Diarrhea can cause dehydration. Drinking more will not stop your diarrhea, but it will help make up for the liquids you lose.

Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of fluids each day.

Tips on drinking more liquids:

- Drink an extra cup of liquid for every watery bowel movement you have. Sports drinks are a good choice
- Drink small amounts many times during the day
- Drink liquids slowly
- Warm or room temperature liquids may be easier to drink
- If you want to drink juice, dilute it with water. Mix half juice and half water

Be safe:

- If your diarrhea is severe (more than 7 times a day) you may need to get liquids intravenously (through an IV) to keep you hydrated

3. Change your diet

If you have mild diarrhea, eating less fibre may help. Try to remove all skins, peels, membranes and seeds from fruits and vegetables.

| Drinks & foods to help ease diarrhea | Drinks & foods you should limit |
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| Water, clear juice, ice chips or popsicles | Pop and fizzy drinks |
| Flat non-fizzy, non-caffeinated drinks | Caffeine |
| Broth, strained clear soup | Alcohol |
| Fruit like peeled pears, apples and apricots | Prune juice, fruit juice with pulp |
| Breads and low fibre cereals, white rice and tapioca | Whole wheat breads, high fibre cereals and grains |
| Protein from foods like eggs, meat, chicken, yogurt and smooth peanut butter | Raw vegetables and dried fruits like prunes and raisins |

4. Plan for outings

Sometimes diarrhea can cause an urgent need to get to a bathroom. Try to plan ahead so you can feel more comfortable leaving home.

How to plan ahead:

- Find the nearest bathroom before you need it when you go out
- Bring a change of clothes in case of an accident
- If you think an accident may happen, wear absorbent, throw-away underwear

5. Take care of your skin

When you have diarrhea, the skin around your bum area can get damaged and be painful. To avoid infection or feeling uncomfortable, use these tips to take care of your skin:

Take a sitz bath:

- A sitz bath is a warm, soothing soak for your perineal or bum area
- Recipe for a sitz bath → add 1-2 tablespoons of baking soda or 1-2 teaspoons of salt to the water
- You can use your bathtub, a large basin or a plastic sitz bath that fits over a toilet seat
- Soak your bottom for about 10-15 minutes each time

If your skin is still sore, try:

- Wearing cotton underwear with no elastic around the leg holes. Large boxer shorts are great for both men and women
- Your health care team may give you an ointment or cream to protect open skin
- Over-the-counter creams and ointments with zinc oxide may help heal the skin