



Dietary Management of Diarrhea

There are many possible causes of diarrhea. Sometimes it can be difficult to determine what the cause of your diarrhea is. The most common causes of diarrhea include:

- Bacterial or viral infection
- Side effect of medication
- Food intolerance (e.g. lactose intolerance)
- Spoiled food or contaminated water
- Overuse of laxatives
- Surgery in which part of the bowel or stomach is removed
- Mental health factors (e.g. stress)
- Bowel disease (e.g. inflammatory bowel disease, celiac disease)

To best manage diarrhea, the actual cause of the diarrhea should be identified and addressed.

In some cases diet changes may help with diarrhea. The following are general diet tips that may help reduce your diarrhea. If your diarrhea is caused by a food intolerance, a bowel disease, or surgery that involved removal of part of the bowel or stomach, then you may need to follow more specific diet guidelines. Please talk to your dietitian in these cases.

General Dietary Tips to Manage Diarrhea

Fibre

Choosing a diet that is higher in *soluble fibre*, but low in *insoluble fibre* may help reduce diarrhea. Soluble fiber absorbs water and forms a gel in your bowels. This can help slow down the passage of food. Insoluble fibre does not absorb water and tends to speed up the passage of food through your bowels.

Grain products



Choose:

White rice, white pasta, rice crackers, pretzels, oatmeal cookies, Rice Krispies, Special K, cornflakes, oatmeal, cream of wheat cereal, white flour bread, bun or bagel, English muffin, saltines, melba toast, digestive or arrowroot cookies, vanilla wafers, plain white flour cakes (e.g. angel food cake)

Avoid:

Bran, bran cereals (e.g. Bran Flakes, All Bran, Raisin Bran), granola cereals, Red River cereal, Shredded Wheat, popcorn, corn chips, whole wheat/pumpkin/rye bread, breads or other baked grain products (e.g. muffins) that contain seeds/nuts/dried fruit, brown or wild rice, whole wheat pasta, whole grain crackers

Fruit



Fruits without skins/seeds and membranes may be better tolerated when you have diarrhea.

Choose:

Banana, honeydew, cantaloupe, watermelon, applesauce, mixed fruit sauces without seeds, mango, peeled peaches/nectarines/apricots/apples/pears

Avoid:

Fruits with skins/seeds, prunes or prune juice, berries, rhubarb, grapes, coconut, dried fruits (e.g. raisins, dates, figs)

Vegetables



Cooked vegetables may be better tolerated when you have diarrhea. Vegetables without skins and seeds may also be better tolerated.

Choose:

White or sweet potato (without skin), squash, carrots, green or yellow beans, lettuce (e.g. Iceberg, Boston), mushrooms (without stems), tomato sauce, eggplant, zucchini, vegetables juices

Avoid:

Onions, corn, cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, brussel sprouts, artichokes, peas, turnip

Other high insoluble fibre foods to avoid



Nuts and chunky nut butters (e.g. chunky peanut butter), seeds, beans, legumes, food products that contain any of the foods to Avoid (previous page)

Soluble fibre supplements

For some people, taking a soluble fibre supplement may help improve diarrhea. These are often available in powder form and can be mixed with fluid or food. Some are also available in a capsule or wafer form. Soluble fibre supplements include: Benefibre, Metamucil (both found at your local pharmacy), psyllium powder (found at your local Health Food store).

Fat

For some people, diarrhea may be worsened by high fat intake. In other people, fat intake will have no effect on diarrhea. You may want to try using a low fat diet to see if this helps. If the low fat diet does not improve your diarrhea, then you can discontinue the low fat diet.

Low fat diet

- When choosing dairy products, use low-fat choices: skim or 1% milk, low or non-fat yogurt, low fat cheeses (less than 20%MF)
- When choosing meats, use low-fat choices: lean meats (i.e. pork chops, extra lean ground beef), lean poultry (skinless chicken/turkey breast) and fish
- Limit use of high fat condiments: butter, margarine, mayonnaise, oils, salad dressings, sour cream, cream cheese, cream sauces
- Limit foods that are deep-fried or pan-fried in oil
- Limit high-fat desserts: ice cream, pastries, doughnuts, other desserts made with cream or whole milk
- Limit high fat snack foods: potato chips, corn ships, cheezies, french fries
- Limit nuts and seeds



Other Foods to Limit or Avoid

The following may worsen diarrhea for some people. If you suspect any of these are making your diarrhea worse, then you may want to avoid or limit:

- Caffeine



- Found in regular coffee, tea, colas, chocolate/chocolate beverages

Tip: Low caffeine beverages that you can use instead include decaffeinated coffee/tea/colas and herbal teas

- Some spices

- Hot peppers/hot pepper sauce, chilies/chili sauce and curry

Note that most herbs and spices are generally well tolerated

- Sorbitol and Mannitol

- These are found in some “sugar-free” foods
- If used in large amounts, can cause diarrhea for some people

- Excessive alcohol consumption

- Lactose



- Some people have lactose intolerance, which can sometimes cause diarrhea. Lactose is sugar that is found in milk and milk products. If you suspect lactose intolerance, then you can try avoiding milk and milk products for a short period (i.e. a week) to see if this helps. If your diarrhea improves, then talk to your physician or dietitian about the possibility that you may have lactose intolerance and how best to manage this.

Other Tips

- Try eating smaller and more frequent meals and snacks
- Limit physical activity directly after meals
- Make sure you drink enough fluids in a day to replace lost fluids (9-13 cups of fluids per day)
- Try drinking fluids at room temperature instead of very hot or very cold fluids

If Your Diarrhea is Severe

- Contact your physician
- You may need to limit your diet to only clear fluids temporarily (i.e. 12-24 hours) to allow your bowels to rest. Clear fluids include juices without pulp, clear gelatin desserts (e.g. Jello), popsicles, broth, fruit/sport drinks, Boost fruit beverage supplement, water

Your Dietitian:

Phone number: