

Diarrhea

Diarrhea may have several causes, including chemotherapy, radiation therapy to the abdomen, infection, food sensitivities, and emotional upset. Work with your doctor to identify the cause of your diarrhea so that it can be successfully treated.



During diarrhea, food passes quickly through the bowel before your body has a chance to absorb enough vitamins, minerals, and water. This may cause dehydration, which means that your body does not have enough water to work well. Long-term or severe diarrhea may cause problems, so contact your doctor if the diarrhea is severe or lasts for more than a couple of days. Here are some ideas for coping with diarrhea:

- Drink plenty of fluids to replenish what you lose with the diarrhea.
- Eat small amounts of food throughout the day instead of three large meals.
- Eat plenty of foods and liquids that contain sodium and potassium, two important minerals that help your body work properly. These minerals are often lost during diarrhea. Good high-sodium liquids include bouillon or fat-free broth. Foods high in potassium that don't cause diarrhea include bananas, peach and apricot nectar, and boiled or mashed potatoes. Sports drinks contain both sodium and potassium and have easily absorbable forms of carbohydrates.
- Try these foods:
 - yogurt, cottage cheese
 - rice, noodles, or potatoes
 - farina or cream of wheat
 - eggs (cooked until the whites are solid; not fried)
 - smooth peanut butter
 - white bread
 - canned, peeled fruits and well-cooked vegetables
 - skinned chicken or turkey, lean beef, or fish (broiled or baked, not fried)
- Avoid:
 - greasy, fatty, or fried foods if they make your diarrhea worse
 - raw vegetables and the skins, seeds, and stringy fibers of unpeeled fruits
 - high-fiber vegetables, such as broccoli, corn, dried beans, cabbage, peas, and cauliflower
 - Avoid very hot or cold food or beverages. Drink liquids that are at room temperature.
- Limit foods and drinks that contain caffeine, such as coffee, some sodas, and chocolate.
- If you have a sudden, short-term attack of diarrhea, try having nothing but clear liquids for the next 12 to 14 hours. ([see chart](#)) This lets your bowel rest and replaces the important fluids lost during the diarrhea. Make sure your doctor or nurse knows about this problem.
- Be careful when using milk and milk products. The lactose they contain can make diarrhea worse. Most people, though, can handle small amounts (about 1-1/2 cups) of milk or milk products.

Special Diets for Special Needs

When you have special needs because of your cancer or treatment, your doctor or registered dietitian may prescribe a special diet. For example, a soft diet may be best if your mouth, throat, esophagus, or stomach is sore. Or, if your treatment makes it difficult for you to digest dairy products, you may need to follow a low-lactose diet. Other special diets include a clear-liquid diet, a full-liquid diet, and a fiber-restricted diet.

Some special diets are well balanced and can be followed for long periods of time. Others, however, should be followed for only a few days because they may not provide enough nutrients for the long term. If you think you need a special diet, talk with your doctor and a registered dietitian. Together, you can work out a plan. You also should work with your doctor and dietitian if you are already on a special diet for a disease such as diabetes, kidney, or heart disease.