

Diarrhea

Diarrhea (also called liquid stool) is a symptom that can be caused by many things. It is important to treat all causes of diarrhea. This information will explain some of the causes of diarrhea and their treatment.

Impaction

A severe impaction can cause diarrhea. An impaction is the collection of a large amount of body waste (called stool) that remains in the colon. The stool can be hard or soft. Diarrhea occurs when liquid stool in the small intestine seeps around hard impacted stool in the colon. **Do not** take anti-diarrhea medicine because the impaction will get worse. The treatment for this kind of diarrhea is removal of the impaction. Your nurse will help you if you have an impaction.

Lactose Intolerance

You may have diarrhea if your body lacks the enzyme to digest milk and milk products. Milk products are anything made from milk, such as yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese and ice cream. Treat this kind of diarrhea in one of two ways: 1) take Lactaid® when eating or drinking milk or milk products; or 2) stop eating or drinking milk products.

Food Allergies

If you have food allergies, you may get diarrhea after you eat foods that you are allergic to. You should stop eating the foods that cause diarrhea and discuss your food allergies with your doctor.

Antibiotic Therapy

Antibiotics (medicines prescribed to treat an infection) may cause diarrhea by destroying the bacteria that normally live in the intestinal lining. If you have diarrhea when taking antibiotics, follow the tips below to help normalize your intestinal lining:

- Eat two servings of yogurt per day that contain acidophilus or live cultures. Avoid yogurts that can cause your gastrointestinal (GI) tract to become more active (such as those containing bifidus regularis).
- Drink buttermilk.
- Take acidophilus or lactobacillus in pill form, available in pharmacies or health food stores.

Ask your pharmacist about over-the-counter products that can help with diarrhea that is caused

by antibiotics.

Radiation Therapy

Radiation therapy over the abdomen will affect the lining of your colon – causing diarrhea. Treat this diarrhea with loperamide (brand name Imodium[®], available without a prescription) or Lomotil[®] (prescription only) or both. These medicines will slow the movement of stool through the intestine. Tell your doctor if these medicines do not give you relief. Also, a low-fiber diet will help relieve this type of diarrhea. Ask your doctor for a consultation with a dietitian to help you with your diet.

For more information, see the handout “Bowel Management for Frequent Stooling.”

Cancer Surgery

Having surgery to remove part of your intestine may cause you to have frequent stools because stool now moves more quickly through your intestine. Often these stools are soft and formed, not liquid stools.

To help slow down stools, take Imodium or Lomotil at the time **your doctor or nurse suggests**. You may take medicinal fiber, such as psyllium (Metamucil[®]) or methylcellulose (Citrucel[®]) with about 2 ounces of water to slow the movement in the GI tract. The fiber absorbs the excess fluid like a sponge. When you take an appropriate amount of psyllium, other medicines may not be needed. For more information, see the handout “Bowel Management for Frequent Stooling.” As you increase the dose of psyllium, decrease the dose of Imodium or Lomotil. Ask your nurse or dietitian for more information on fiber.

Spicy foods, deep fried foods and hot liquids can cause frequent stooling after surgery. The BRAT diet is helpful in slowing movement in the GI tract. The BRAT diet includes: bananas, white rice, applesauce and dry toast.

Chemotherapy

Certain types of chemotherapy drugs cause diarrhea for a brief time. Use guidelines that your doctor gives you to control diarrhea. If you do not receive instructions from your doctor, you may take Imodium to control diarrhea. Do not take Imodium if you are being checked for C-difficile or other organisms. When taking Imodium, do not take more than 8 tablets (16 milligrams) per day (read the label on the package). **Do not** take over-the-counter medicine for your diarrhea unless your doctor says it is okay. Some products may have additional medicines that can hide a fever and/or affect your platelet function. If you continue to have diarrhea, call your doctor for help.

Chemotherapy Drugs That Cause Diarrhea

- 5-azacitidine
- 5-FU/Leucovorin
- Adriamycin[®] (doxorubicin)
- Camptosar[®] (irinotecan)
- Cytosine Arabinoside
- Daunorubicin
- High dose Cisplatin, Oxaliplatin, Paclitaxel and Cyclophosphamide
- Hycamtin[®] (topotecan)
- Hydrea[®] (hydroxyurea)
- Methotrexate
- Nitrosureas
- Thioguanine

If you have been taking fiber prior to taking a chemotherapy drug that causes diarrhea, stop taking the fiber until after you have finished chemotherapy.

Medicines

The following medicines can cause diarrhea. Ask your doctor or nurse before taking these.

- Alcohol
- Antacids that are magnesium based
- Aldomet[®] (methyldopa)
- Caffeine
- Cytotec[®] (misoprostol)
- Enteral nutrition supplements
- Laxatives
- Non-steroidal drugs
- Reglan[®] (metoclopramide)
- Theophylline

Infections and Parasites

Some bacteria and certain types of parasites can cause diarrhea. Medicine may be an appropriate treatment. Your doctor may request a stool specimen in order to prescribe the correct medicine. If you are diagnosed with a clostridium difficile infection, please ask for a copy of “Clostridium Difficile-Associated Diarrhea.”

Other Causes

The following problems can also cause diarrhea:

- Gastroenteritis - inflammation of the stomach
- Diverticulitis - inflammation of areas in the intestine
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Adding medicinal fiber too fast to the diet will increase diarrhea, cramping and bloating. To prevent these problems, introduce medicinal fiber in 1 teaspoon increments every five days. This is described in the handout “Bowel Management for Frequent Stooling.” Your nurse can give you a copy.

Unknown Causes

If you have diarrhea and don't know why, talk to your doctor or nurse. Your treatment will vary depending on the **cause** of the problem. It is important to treat the causes, **not** the symptom.

How much diarrhea is normal?

When you have diarrhea, follow the guidelines below to check the amount of diarrhea or liquid stool you have.

- It is normal to have 1,000 cc or less of liquid stool per day.
- If you have more than 1,500 cc of liquid stool in 24 hours, contact your health care team for guidance.

A “hat” is a container that can be placed in the back of your toilet to help you measure liquid stool at home. This is available through MD Anderson. Ask your nurse to give you a hat.