

# diarrhea

## Cancer

Diarrhea (frequent, loose bowel movements) is a common side effect of both cancer and cancer treatments.

Diarrhea can also be caused by infections, food sensitivities, antibiotics or emotional upset. Diarrhea occurs when foods and liquids pass through the gut so quickly that the body cannot absorb and digest it. This can also cause dehydration. Diarrhea symptoms can vary from mild to severe and last a short or long time.

## Managing with Nutrition:

- To prevent dehydration, drink plenty of fluids to replace those you lose. Clear liquids are best, including water, sports drinks, clear flat soft drinks, chicken broth, or weak caffeine-free tea.
- Choose soft, bland foods. Good choices include noodles, hard-boiled eggs, white bread, pureed vegetables, lean turkey and chicken, fish and mashed potatoes.
- Try the BRAT diet. BRAT stands for bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast. These foods are higher in water-absorbing soluble fiber.
- Include foods that are higher in potassium and sodium. Try potatoes, broth, apricots and bananas.
- Eat small meals, more often. Eating 5-6 small meals per day may be easier on the gut than 3 large meals.
- Consume food and drinks at room temperature.

## Tips For When You Experience Diarrhea:

- Take anti-diarrheal medications as prescribed.
- Rest your gut for 12-14 hours after having diarrhea and only drink clear liquids during this time. Use the *Clear Liquids* handout for a list of suggested foods and beverages.
- For nutrition recommendations, review the *Foods to Help with Diarrhea* found on the next page.

## Avoid:

- Foods high in insoluble fiber. These foods may make diarrhea worse. Avoid raw fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, whole grain products, and high-fiber produce (broccoli, corn, beans, cabbage, cauliflower and peas).
- Caffeine-containing products (coffee, tea, chocolate, some soda).
- High-sugar beverages, such as regular soda and fruit punch.
- Lactose-containing dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt).
- Sugar-free products sweetened with xylitol or sorbitol. These sweeteners are mostly found in sugar-free candy and gum.
- Spicy foods (hot peppers, curries, buffalo wings, salsa, black pepper, hot sauce).
- Greasy, fatty or fried foods (fatty cuts of meat, French fries, potato chips, fast food).
- Alcohol

### Call your doctor immediately if you experience any of the following signs or symptoms with diarrhea:

- Six or more loose bowel movements a day for more than two days
- Blood in your stool or rectal area
- Weight loss due to diarrhea
- Fever of 100.5° F or higher
- Inability to control bowel movements
- Diarrhea or abdominal cramps that last more than a day
- Diarrhea accompanied by dizziness