



**ROGEL CANCER CENTER**  
MICHIGAN MEDICINE

# Nutritional Management of Diarrhea

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## What is Diarrhea?

Diarrhea is frequent bowel movements that may be soft, loose or watery. There are many causes of diarrhea including cancer treatments (radiation, chemotherapy and some surgeries), infection and some medications (including those used to treat constipation). Notify your medical team if you are experiencing diarrhea.

## Drink up!

- **Increase the amount of fluids you drink.**

Sip fluids slowly, but constantly, all day. Consuming large amounts of fluid at once may encourage diarrhea. Try to drink 8 to 10 cups of fluid daily. Fluids at room temperature may be better tolerated than hot or cold fluids.

*Try:* Gatorade<sup>®</sup>, Powerade<sup>®</sup>, or other “sports drinks”, clear broth or bouillon, apple juice, white grape juice, fruit nectars (apricot, peach, pear, papaya, mango, or banana), flat soda pop, or water.

## What foods should I eat?

The following are foods that can help improve diarrhea and some that may worsen it.

- **Increase foods high in soluble fiber.**

This is the “sticky” fiber found in foods like oatmeal and white rice.

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or call (877) 907-0859

**Try:** Bananas, white rice, white toast, applesauce, oatmeal, mashed potatoes, noodles, canned fruits without the skins, cream of rice (Farina) cereal, pancakes, waffles without syrup\*, graham crackers, saltine crackers, and oyster crackers.

\*Note: sugar may worsen diarrhea

- **Increase foods high in salt and potassium (unless you have been advised otherwise by your doctor).**

When you have diarrhea, your body loses salt and potassium. Eating foods high in these minerals can help you replace these losses.

**Try:** Bananas, apricots (peeled and canned – not dried), broth-based soups, broth, pretzels, salted crackers, and mashed potatoes. Drink fruit nectars like those mentioned before, or sports drinks.

- **Increase calories.** Eat small, frequent meals and snacks. Do not eat large amounts of food at once, because this can worsen diarrhea. Have small snacks often all day long.

**Try:** well-cooked eggs, chicken or fish that is not fried, bananas, avocados, soups made from clear broth, white bread, oatmeal, cream of rice (Farina®), pudding, gelatin, custard, yogurt, cottage cheese (unless lactose intolerant), pancakes, waffles, graham crackers, saltine crackers, and sherbet.

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Drink Carnation® Instant Breakfast made with milk, Lactaid® milk or soymilk. Try Ensure®, Boost®, apple or grape juices, or fruit nectars.

- **Eat foods with probiotics.** Probiotics are found naturally in all yogurt products and have shown to be beneficial for various types of diarrhea, including chemotherapy and/or radiation induced diarrhea.
  
- **Not all diarrhea is a result of lactose-intolerance.** However, sometimes cancer treatments, such as radiation can lead to changes in the digestive tract that can lead to lactose intolerance. If you notice that you are more sensitive to some dairy products. Here are some tips that can help:
  - Limit dairy products to ½ cup serving per meal. If diarrhea continues use lactose free milk and other dairy products or lactase enzyme supplements (Lactaid®) instead of limiting or avoiding these foods altogether.
  - Cultured milk products such as yogurt, buttermilk and hard cheeses may still be tolerated, even though they are not lactose free.

**See back page for foods to avoid.**

This document is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Our aim is to promote active participation in your care and treatment by providing information and education.

Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options should be discussed with your physician.

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## What foods should you avoid?

Type of Food	Why?
<b>Citrus and other acidic beverages</b>	Oranges, orange juice, grapefruits, grapefruit juice, lemons, limes, lemonade, limeade, pineapple and pineapple juice, and tomato products may irritate the stomach and worsen diarrhea.
<b>Insoluble fiber</b>	Insoluble fiber is rough or stringy fiber. Avoid raw fruit and vegetables (especially with skins), whole-grain breads and cereals (such as granola or shredded wheat), brown rice, wild rice, nuts, seeds, popcorn, beans, lentils, peas, and corn.
<b>Fatty and greasy foods</b>	Fried foods, bacon, sausage, pizza, and gravies. Salad dressings, mayonnaise, rich desserts, pastries, donuts, and potato chips may also aggravate diarrhea in some.
<b>Caffeine</b>	Caffeine can speed up how quickly food moves through the body. Avoid large amounts of regular coffees, teas, colas, and other caffeinated beverages.
<b>Olestra and Olean®</b>	Avoid the “non-fat fat”. This fake fat can cause diarrhea. Avoid Lay’s® Light chips and Fat Free Pringles® and other products that contain Olean® or Olestra.
<b>Sorbitol or sugar-free foods</b>	Sorbitol and Xylitol, ingredients found in many sugar free candies and diet foods, acts as a laxative, and can aggravate diarrhea.

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