

Food Fact Sheet: Diarrhoea and Diet

What is diarrhoea?

Occasional changes in bowel function are common. Diarrhoea means having more frequent, loose or watery poo (otherwise known as stools). Diarrhoea can cause weight loss, fluid loss and the loss of important minerals and electrolytes needed to keep you healthy. Diarrhoea can leave you feeling tired and unwell. You may also find it difficult to go about your daily life when you need to go to the toilet urgently and often. If diarrhoea is very severe, you can become very dehydrated.

What causes diarrhoea?

There are many causes of diarrhoea and these include, infections, food poisoning, food intolerance, stress and occasionally the side effects of taking medication, including anti-retroviral medication. Furthermore, it can also be caused by HIV itself. You may be suffering from Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) - the gut condition that affects the digestive system and causes symptoms like stomach cramps, bloating, diarrhoea and constipation. Or sometimes the cause of diarrhoea is just unknown.

Why is it important to treat diarrhoea?

Treating diarrhoea is important to limit loss of nutrients, protect health and nutritional status and prevent malnutrition. Try to keep eating and drinking during a bout of diarrhoea. If your symptoms persist for more than a few days, it may be worth contacting your healthcare team to have a stool sample checked for infections. Use our [food and symptoms diary \(available on request\)](#) to record what you are eating, drinking and any symptoms you may have. This will be useful to take to your next appointment.

How is diarrhoea treated?

Anti-diarrhoea drugs such as Imodium™ (loperamide) can help, but check first whether your diarrhoea is due to an infection.






Should I see the doctor?

It is important to visit your doctor if you:

- have severe diarrhoea
- have recently been in hospital
- have recently taken antibiotics
- have diarrhoea that has blood in it
- are bleeding from your back passage
- have diarrhoea that lasts longer than a week
- find it difficult to reach the toilet in time








What should I **include** in my diet to improve symptoms of diarrhoea?

<p>Soluble fibre</p> 	<p>Try to increase sources of soluble fibre in your diet.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soluble fibre contains gums and pectin which allows it to absorb water forming a gel in the stomach which adds bulk to the stool, making it less watery and helps to slow digestion.• Fibre is found in oats, fruits and vegetables, beans and lentils. Eat boiled potato, high fibre white bread or toast, banana and stewed apple (skin removed).• Peel your fruit and vegetables, remove pips and skin before eating them.
<p>Carbohydrate foods</p> 	<p>Eat plain carbohydrate foods such as white rice, white toast or boiled potatoes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eat small portions of well-cooked vegetables and fruit.• Remove any skins, pith and seeds. These will help to replace any minerals you have lost because of the diarrhoea• Eat plain starchy foods such as rice, cornmeal, white bread or toast, pasta or boiled potatoes, crackers and plain biscuits.• Cornflakes, rice crisp cereals and oatmeal cereals
<p>Fluid</p> 	<p>Drink plenty of fluids (at least 8-10 cups a day).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aim for 2 litres per day and include water, diluted tea or fruit juice.• Drink them at room temperature• In case of severe diarrhoea, try our oral rehydration drink to help replace lost fluids, electrolytes and calories. Just mix ½ tsp of salt and ½ tsp of bicarbonate of soda to 1L of prepared squash.
<p>Small, frequent meals</p> 	<p>Eat small and frequent meals throughout the day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eat 5-6 small meals to help you maintain weight.• Include a range of foods from all food groups such as bananas, oranges, potatoes, chicken, fish and tomatoes to replace lost potassium. Use plain method to prepare fish, eggs, meat and chicken.
<p>Stress relief</p> 	<p>Have some form of stress relief as anxiety may cause diarrhoea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try light exercise, talking to a friend, family member or counsellor, or speak to your GP.



What should I **avoid** in my diet to help manage diarrhoea?

Drinks 	Avoid alcohol, high sugary drinks and caffeinated drinks including coke, energy drinks and coffee. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• These drinks can make diarrhoea worse and will make you lose more fluids.
Insoluble fibre 	Reduce intake of insoluble fibre <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid wholegrains foods such as wholemeal breads, pasta, brown rice and high fibre cereals.• Vegetables with stalks and stringy vegetables. Vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, beans and fruits with their skin on.• Avoid pips, skins and nuts such as raspberries, lentils, baked beans, peas and sweet corn.• Avoid dried fruits, nuts and seeds until diarrhoea resolved.
High fat foods 	Stay away from fatty foods as they may worsen diarrhoea. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid fast food, chips, butter, pastries, pies, cream sauces sausages and deep-fried foods.
Lactose 	Limit milk and milk products if your diarrhoea is severe or if you are lactose intolerant. <p>Try soy, rice and nut-based products, these will not make diarrhoea worse as they do not contain lactose – the sugar in cow's or goat's milk. Yoghurt and hard cheese also have little lactose and can be eaten</p>
Spicy foods 	Stay away from spicy food if you cannot tolerate them <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You may find spicy, highly flavoured foods may make things worse.• Foods containing chilli should be avoided

Don't forget that **it is important to re-introduce** wholegrains, fruits and vegetables into the diet **once your symptoms have passed.**

Should I avoid milk and dairy products?

You may find that milk makes your diarrhoea worse especially if it has been a very severe or prolonged bout. This is because you can temporarily lose the ability to digest the sugar (lactose) in milk. If you find this is the case, cut down on milk for a while.

Once the diarrhoea has improved you can gradually increase the amount of milk you take.

What about probiotics?

There are drinks and yogurts containing 'good bacteria' which claim to help digestion and help your bowels to settle down to a regular pattern again. These are best tried after the diarrhoea has settled. If your CD4 count is below 200, do not take these without asking your medical team for advice.

After your diarrhoea has settled down you can slowly add back the foods into your diet again.

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