



Suffering with diarrhoea whilst undergoing cancer treatment

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Diarrhoea can sometimes occur during your treatment. Your symptoms may be improved by changing the foods that you eat. However, as soon as your symptoms ease you should return to a normal balanced diet.

It is important that you tell your doctor that you have diarrhoea as they may be able to prescribe some medicine to help your symptoms.

The following tips may help ease diarrhoea:

- Drink plenty of fluids (sip drinks regularly) to prevent dehydration. Take at least 8 to 10 cups of fluid daily
- Limit or avoid alcohol, strong tea and strong coffee
- Limit or avoid spicy, greasy and fatty or fried foods
- Avoid very hot or very cold food and drinks
- Limit use of artificial sweeteners such as sorbitol and xylitol which are often found in chewing gum, sugar free mints and drinks. These can make diarrhoea worse
- Eating slowly and chewing food well is important
- It may help your symptoms if you avoid drinking fluids at the same time as eating
- Eat small frequent meals choosing from ideas on the back of this leaflet

It may be helpful to avoid or limit high fibre foods. Try this for up to **one week** and see if it makes a difference. If your symptoms do not improve during this time return to your usual diet and consult your doctor.

- Avoid high fibre or whole-wheat breakfast cereals such as All Bran, Bran Flakes, Shredded Wheat and Weetabix
- Avoid wholemeal or granary breads, wholemeal flour, wholemeal chapattis, brown rice and wholemeal pasta
- Avoid dried fruit, seeds and nuts
- Limit fruit and vegetables to a total of two portions per day (you should remove the peel and skins)
- Limit lentils and pulses (peas and beans) to small portions only

Some people may benefit from cutting down on milk and milky products. Try the following for up to **one week**:

- Limit milk to small amounts on cereal or in tea and coffee but avoid drinking milk or taking milky products. Milk and milky products are a valuable source of nutrition so if cutting down does not improve your symptoms it is important to reintroduce them again as soon as possible.

If your symptoms persist, you are losing weight or you need to follow a restricted diet for more than one week, please ask your Radiographer, Nurse or Doctor to refer you to the Dietitian.

Meal and snack ideas

Breakfast:

- Corn Flakes / Rice Krispies / Rice snaps / Rice pops with milk
- White toast with butter or margarine and jam, marmalade honey or syrup
- Croissants or pastries
- Small cooked breakfast (e.g. grilled bacon, poached or scrambled eggs, toast)
- Omelette
- Buttered chapatti/ rusks

Main meals:

- White bread sandwich with cheese, fish or cold meat
- Cooked meat, fish or poultry

Snacks:

- Plain biscuit
- Fruit (one portion)
- Cheese and crackers
- Crisps
- Plain yoghurt
- Cheese on toast
- Scone
- Crumpet

Sources of further information

University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

The Patrick Room

Cancer Centre

University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TH

Telephone: 0121 697 8417

About this information

This guide is provided for general information only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Every effort is taken to ensure that this information is accurate and consistent with current knowledge and practice at the time of publication.

This information was produced by the QEHB Radiotherapy Dietitian.

Please use the space below to write down any questions you may have and bring this with you to your next appointment.

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