

# Diarrhea

## Nutrition Fact Sheet

**Definition:** Frequent, loose, watery bowel movements that occur at least three times per day. Additional symptoms may include abdominal cramps, bloating, fever, and/or blood in stool. The average number of regular bowel movements varies from 3-21 times per week.

**Consequences:** Decreased appetite, inability to absorb nutrients in food, malnutrition, weight loss, wasting, and possible drug failure. Persistent diarrhea may also lead to dehydration, electrolyte imbalance, hospitalization and death. Until diarrhea has stopped, good nutrition and hydration are absolutely necessary.



### Possible Causes of Diarrhea

- Changes in the gastrointestinal tract due to HIV
- Infections from viruses, bacteria or parasites
- Medications including antibiotics and protease inhibitors
- Doses of vitamin C greater than 1000mg per day
- Difficulty absorbing fats
- Milk (lactose) intolerance
- Food sensitivities and/or allergies
- Liquid nutritional supplements, especially when ingested quickly and on an empty stomach
- Alcoholic beverages
- Stress and anxiety

### Dietary Management Recommendations

**Limit these foods or eat smaller portions to help manage diarrhea.**

- Fatty, greasy and fried foods: bacon, gravy, fries, chips
- Spicy foods: chilies, jalapenos, hot sauce
- Foods high in sugar and/or artificial sweeteners: sorbitol, mannitol
- Chocolate and caffeinated beverages: coffee, tea, sodas, energy drinks
- Foods high in bulk and roughage: wheat bran, high insoluble fiber cereals, skins on fruits and vegetables
- Gas producing foods: cauliflower, beans, bell peppers, onions, cabbage
- Dairy products: milk, ice cream, soft cheeses
- Alcoholic beverages
- Medications which contain high amounts of lactose. Ask your pharmacist for more information.



### In Addition, Try the Following:

Eat small, frequent meals. Six to eight small meals will be easier to digest than three larger ones. Eat bananas, boiled white rice, unsweetened applesauce, dry toasted bread, caffeine-free tea, potatoes without skin, cream of rice or wheat cereal, dry crackers/saltines, broths, cooked carrots, flavored gelatin, yogurt with live cultures, noodles, hard-boiled eggs, and rice-cakes.

For more information or fact sheets contact:

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## Manage Lactose in Your Diet

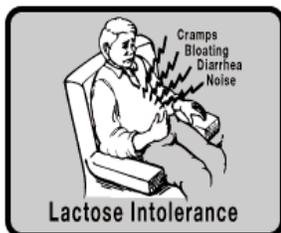
- Test your ability to handle lactose after diarrhea subsides by adding dairy products back in small amounts. For example, 1/4 to 1/2 cup at a time. Fluid milk may be difficult, though yogurt with live cultures may be fine.
- Try enteric-coated *Lactobacillus acidophilus* tablets if yogurt with live cultures not tolerated.
- Try lactose-free milk or lactase enzyme supplements to help digest lactose.

## Add Soluble Fiber

- Oatmeal, applesauce, fruits and vegetables without skin, such as apples, grapes, apricots, pears, and peaches, potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, and split pea soup.
- Psyllium, Metamucil, Fibercon and other bulking agents are formulated in powders, bars, and capsules and can be purchased over the counter. Start with a small dose.

## Drink 10–12 Eight Ounce Glasses of Fluid per Day

- Drink between meals. Try mild liquids like diluted fruit juices or defizzed fruit flavored sodas, sports drinks, rice water, weak tea, soups and broth.
- Electrolyte solutions and drinks. Oral rehydration drinks can be easily made: 1 quart of water, 1 teaspoon salt, 4 teaspoons sugar, and 1 heaping teaspoon of baking soda, boiled for 3–5 minutes, refrigerated and then flavored with lemon, lime or fruit juice. You may also purchase commercial electrolyte replacement products such as Pedialyte, Infalyte, CeraLyte, or Gatorade for persistent diarrhea.
- Rice drinks, like horchata, can be purchased or made easily: 1 cup white rice into 6 cups of boiling water, reduce to a simmer until rice is cooked. Blend the rice and add flavorings, like sugar, cinnamon, and lemon rind, to taste.
- Rice soups, like congee, a classic Chinese dish, are easy to make and serve the same purpose as horchata. Combine 1 cup of washed short grain rice and 8 cups of water in a large saucepan with a tight-fitting lid. Bring to a boil, cover, and reduce heat to simmer. Cook for 1 1/2 hours and serve hot. Add salt and pepper to taste. As tolerated, add vegetables like spinach, tomatoes, or green onions, and tofu or an egg, slightly beaten and thoroughly cooked.



## Other Treatments That May Lessen Diarrhea (consult with your doctor)

- Pancreatic Enzymes can help with diarrhea caused by an absorption problem due to enzyme deficiencies. Pancreatic enzymes are available through prescription, buyers clubs, or health food stores.
- L-glutamine may help ease diarrhea caused by irritation of the intestinal lining. Typical recommendations for adults may be up to 30g/day (divided into 3 doses) for 5–14 days, followed by 5–10g/day. Take without food. (Not recommended with end-stage liver or kidney disease).
- Enteric-coated *Lactobacillus acidophilus* tablets or other probiotics may help to maintain good bacteria in the gut.

## When to Call Your Doctor

- If you have diarrhea for more than three days.
- If you have any unusual changes in bowel movements, such as bloody or black stools.
- If you have severe abdominal or rectal pain.
- If you have become dehydrated—evidenced by excessive thirst, dry mouth or skin, little or no urination, dark-colored urine, severe weakness, dizziness or light-headedness.
- If you have a consistent fever of more than 102° F.

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