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Tips for Handling Diarrhea

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For: Cancer Nutrition Info, LLC

Summary:

Diarrhea can be a problem for some individuals undergoing cancer treatment. The most important thing you can do to manage your diarrhea is to take your medications as prescribed. Your health care team can help you determine which medications will work best for you. However, in addition to medication, there are many nutrition steps you can take to help decrease diarrhea. The following article contains nutrition tips and tricks you can use to manage and decrease diarrhea.

Article:

Always talk to your healthcare team about diet and nutrition changes you'd like to try. For medical reasons, some people should not try the following nutrition tips. If you have questions talk to your health care team to determine what is best for you.

Nutrition Tips for Diarrhea

- Increase intake of foods high in soluble fiber such as oatmeal, white rice, bananas, white toast, applesauce, canned fruits such as peaches (avoid the skins and peels of fruit), plain pasta, noodles, cream of rice cereal, and plain unsweetened graham crackers.
- Drink 6 to 8 cups of fluid each day to replace losses.
- Be sure to SIP fluids slowly, but constantly all day. If you need to set an alarm watch or timer and make sure you take a SIP every 10-15 minutes.
- Drink fluids at room temperature.
- With each loose bowel movement drink 1 additional cup of fluid.

- Try rice congee (soupy mixture): take 1 cup long-cooking white rice and combine with 6-7 cups of water and 1 tablespoon of salt; cook this according to package directions (typically about 40 minutes); this will be a sticky, soupy mixture; eat and drink mixture. THIS REALLY WORKS! For variety, you can use broth instead of water (omit salt if using broth).
- Try Gatorade or other sports drinks (avoid those with more than 50 calories per serving; these contain simple sugar that can make diarrhea worse).
- Make and drink your own version of “sports drinks”. SIP these slowly over the day. Try one of these 2 recipes to help replace fluids and electrolytes lost with diarrhea:

Homemade Sports Drink #1

- 1 cup orange juice (substitute non-citrus if mouth sores present).
- 8 teaspoons sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon baking soda
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 liter water

Homemade Sports Drink #2

- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon potassium chloride (OTC at any pharmacy)
 - 8 teaspoons sugar
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda
 - 1 liter water
- Sip plain broth or bouillon, flat soda pop, and water.
 - Try diluted, non-acidic juices, such as apricot nectar and peach nectar.
 - Drink broth and sports drinks to replace electrolyte losses (<50 calories/serving).
 - Eat small frequent meals.
 - Drink fluids between meals rather than with meals (separate liquids from solids).

- Lie down after eating.
- Nibble on salty foods, such as crackers and pretzels, to replace lost sodium.
- Decrease intake of foods high in insoluble fiber, such as fresh fruit with the peel (flesh of fruit is generally ok), raw vegetables (well-cooked vegetables are generally ok), whole grain breads and cereals, beans, peas, and popcorn.
- Try a powdered glutamine (protein) supplement; glutamine is a fine powder that can be mixed with liquid and taken at a dose of 10 grams of glutamine, three times daily; Do not take glutamine if your kidney (renal) or liver (hepatic) function is poor or impaired. Ask your health care team to help you determine if glutamine might help minimize your diarrhea.
- Try clove tea: simmer 6-8 whole cloves and 1 teabag of herbal, non-caffeinated tea (try ginger or chamomile) in 1 cup (8 ounces) of water; simmer this mixture until the volume is reduced by half (until only ½ cup remains); let cool until just warm and drink.
- Limit fatty or greasy foods.
- Limit or eliminate dairy products if helpful.
- One dairy product you CAN try is plain yogurt (add your own flavorings; ex: blenderized fruit, vanilla extract, Stevia, monk fruit). Yogurt contains active cultures that can aid the body in digestion.

Avoid the following foods, which may worsen diarrhea

- Sometimes, people have lactose (dairy) intolerance during treatment. This is usually temporary. During treatment, try using Lactaid products to help your body digest dairy foods. Or, try avoiding milk and dairy foods (milk, cheese, butter, sour cream, ice cream) to see if this improves diarrhea. If you have lactose intolerance, your diarrhea will improve when you use Lactaid or avoid dairy foods.
- Avoid foods high in insoluble fiber including raw fruit and vegetables (especially with the skins and peels), whole grain breads and cereals (whole wheat, rye, bran, shredded wheat or granola), nuts, seeds, popcorn, beans, lentils, peas, wild rice, and brown rice.

- Avoid fatty and greasy foods such as French fries, bacon, fried foods, pizza, mayonnaise, desserts, donuts, pastries, potato chips and other high fat snack foods, gravies, and salad dressings.
- Avoid drinks that contain caffeine such as coffee, cola, or large amount of regular tea. Caffeine can worsen diarrhea.
- Avoid strong spices and herbs, especially those that are 'spicy hot'.
- Avoid very hot and very cold foods. These temperatures may worsen diarrhea.
- Avoid foods made with "Olean" (olestra), such as WOW chips and snack foods.
- Avoid sugar free foods, gums, and candies. These contain sorbitol, which is a 'sugar-alcohol' that can make diarrhea worse.
- Avoid tobacco (cigarettes, pipe, or chewing tobacco) and alcohol.

Call your medical care team if...

- You have six or more loose bowel movements per day with no improvement after 2 days.
- You have blood in your stool.
- You lose more than 5 lbs since the start of the diarrhea.
- You have a fever.
- Your abdomen (stomach) becomes puffy, swollen, or sore to the touch.
- You have constipation followed by a small amount of diarrhea or oozing stool. This may mean that your bowel is impacted (blocked) and requires immediate medical attention.

Information taken from: <http://www.cancernutritioninfo.com> with slight modifications made.

Reviewed by Theresa Shepherd, MS, RD, CDN, CSO, 2/2018.