

ONCOLOGY

After Chemotherapy Care Instructions

Diarrhea

What is diarrhea?

Cancer and cancer treatment may cause diarrhea. Diarrhea is an increase in number of stools (called bowel movements) per day over what is normal for you. The amount of stools may increase and become loose or watery. Diarrhea is an increase of 4–6 stools per day and/or nighttime stools.

Chemotherapy can cause diarrhea because it harms healthy cells that line your large and small bowel. It may also speed up your bowels. Diarrhea can also be caused by infections or drugs such as antibiotics, stool softeners, and laxatives. If diarrhea is not treated, it can cause dehydration (loss of body fluid) and electrolyte imbalances (loss of body minerals) that can be life-threatening.

What can I do at home to care for myself?

- Stop taking any stool softeners or laxatives.
- Take Loperamide (Imodium A-D) 4 mg (2 caplets), followed by 2 mg (1 caplet) every 4 hours until the diarrhea has stopped. Do not take more than 8 caplets per day.
- Drink at least 8–10 servings (8 ounces each) of fluid per day. Try clear fluids, such as water, clear soup, and ginger ale to replace the fluid you are losing.
- Try to drink 1 cup of fluid after each loose stool.
- Eat 5–6 small meals throughout the day, instead of 3 large meals.
- Eat foods that will help thicken your stools, such as bananas, rice, apple-sauce, toast, chicken without the skin, and well-cooked eggs.
- Avoid foods that will make the diarrhea worse, such as raw fruits and vegetables, and greasy and fried foods.
- Avoid drinking milk and milk products, drinks with caffeine, and fruit juices.
- Clean your skin after each bowel movement with a mild soap and water or unscented baby wipes.

continued

***When should I call
my physician?***

- If your skin becomes irritated, gently apply a soothing topical agent such as Vaseline, A & D ointment, or Butt Paste.
- Wash your hands after each bowel movement.

- If you have continued diarrhea after 24 hours, if you are having more than 6 stools per day, or if the above remedies did not work.
- If you have severe pain or cramping in the stomach or abdomen.
- If you have fever greater than 100.5°F.
- If you have blood in your stool.
- If you have nausea or vomiting.
- If you are lightheaded or feel weak.

If you cannot reach your health care team or your symptoms get worse, go to Urgent Care or the Emergency Department.