



## Managing diarrhoea

This information is intended as a guide to help you deal with the symptoms of diarrhoea until you can talk to your doctor. It is not intended to replace medical advice. If your symptoms persist you must inform your doctor.

Diarrhoea may occur due to infection or a side effect of cancer treatments such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy to the pelvis. If you have 4 bowel movements per day more than usual or diarrhoea at night you must inform your doctor.

### Managing your diet

It is important for everybody to eat fibre in their diet. But if you have any symptoms of diarrhoea eating fibre will make them worse.

If you have diarrhoea it is important that you do the following:

#### 1. Reduce the amount of fibre you eat each day

High fibre foods may make your symptoms worse and you should eat less than usual. You will need to check with your doctor or dietitian how long you should do this for.

High fibre foods include:

- Onions
- fruits and vegetables (except banana)
- beans and nuts
- whole grain cereals and bread
- fruit juices (squashes are all right)
- dried fruit and fruit cake

#### 2. Be careful about eating other foods which may make your symptoms worse, so eat less of them.

These include:

- spicy foods
- rich, greasy, fried foods
- foods containing caffeine such as coffee and chocolate

- dairy products such as milk, butter, yogurt, cheese and cream
- very cold or very hot drinks
- products containing sorbitol such as sugar-free mints or chewing gum

#### 3. Eat foods which may help your symptoms by making your stools firmer

These include:

- chicken (without the skin on)
- chicken soup
- fish
- eggs
- rice and pasta
- potatoes (but without skins)
- bananas
- white bread
- cooked fruit (particularly stewed apple)
- low-fibre breakfast cereals such as Cornflakes or Rice Crispies etc.
- dry crackers
- drinks at 'room' temperature

If you have diarrhoea, this may put you off eating. It may help if you eat smaller amounts of food more often, rather than trying to eat large meals.

#### 4. Drink plenty of fluids

When you have the symptoms of diarrhoea, you lose fluids. It is important that these are replaced so you don't get dehydrated. Drink as often as you can, even if it is only small amounts. Avoid alcoholic drinks. The best types of fluids to have include:

- water
- herbal teas
- clear soups
- Any soft drinks (except 'diet' products), if fizzy, let them go flat.

## **5. Self medication**

If you have an urgent problem and cannot get advice from your doctor straight way, anti-diarrhoea tablets can be brought over the counter from a pharmacy. Always be sure to follow the directions on the packet.

Electrolyte sachets can also be bought from a pharmacy. These help to replace minerals lost through diarrhoea. Please ask your pharmacist for information about when to take these.

## **6. Helpful information if you have diarrhoea**

Further information is available from other organisations:

- Tips on how to cope with diarrhoea (Cancer Research UK)
- Coping with bowel problems (Macmillan Cancer Support fact sheet)

These are available from the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre.

If you would like further advice please contact the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre Dietitian, Tel: 01923 844366.