Managing diarrhoea

This information is 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 four bowel movements per day more than usual or diarrhoea at night you **must** inform your doctor or treatment team, or you can contact the 24 hour Acute Oncology Service on 07825 028855 for advice. They will decide if the diarrhoea is a side effect of your treatment and advise you how to manage it.

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 fibre than usual. You will need to check with your doctor or dietitian how long you should do this for.

High fibre foods include:

❍ wholegrain breakfast cereals and muesli
❍ wholemeal bread and flour
❍ brown rice and wholemeal pasta
❍ onions
❍ beans and lentils
❍ nuts
❍ fresh fruit and vegetables with their skins (except bananas)
❍ fruit juices with pulp
❍ dried fruit such as figs, prunes, apricots or dates

2. Be careful about eating other foods which may make your symptoms worse

You may want to eat less of these foods:

❍ spicy foods
❍ rich, greasy or fried foods
❍ foods containing caffeine such as coffee, tea, green tea and chocolate
❍ 'diet' products containing sorbitol or other artificial sweeteners such as sugar-free mints or chewing gum

3. Eat low fibre foods and foods which are easy to digest

These include:

❍ chicken or turkey (without the skin on)
❍ fish
❍ potatoes (without skins)
❍ white bread, rice or pasta
❍ low-fibre breakfast cereals such as Cornflakes or Rice Crispies etc.
❍ jellies, sorbet, ice cream and milk puddings
❍ dairy products such as milk, smooth yogurts and cheese

4. Eat little and often

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.

5. Drink plenty of fluids

When you have 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

6. Self medication

If you have an urgent problem and cannot get advice from your doctor straight way, anti-diarrhoea tablets can be bought 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.

7. Wash your hands

Wash your hands regularly, especially before preparing, serving or eating food. Ideally, use liquid soap in warm running water, but any soap is better than none. Dry your hands properly after washing.

8. Helpful information if you have diarrhoea

Information is available from Macmillan Cancer Support in the following booklets:

❍ Eating problems and cancer
❍ Managing the symptoms of cancer

These are available from the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre or from Macmillan Cancer Support at www.be.macmillan.org.uk

If you would like further advice please contact the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre Dietitian, Tel: 020 3826 2129.

Please see the links below, as this information may also be helpful:-

www.bladderandbowel.org/help-information/resources/toilet-positions/

www.bladderandbowel.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/BABC002_Bristol-Stool-Chart-Jan-2016.pdf

**24 hour Acute Oncology Service
Mount Vernon Cancer Centre: 07825 028855**