

Dietary changes for diarrhoea during radiotherapy

Radiotherapy Department Patient information

Radiotherapy to the pelvis and abdomen can cause diarrhoea and looseness of the bowels. This is a normal reaction to the radiotherapy. In most cases it can be controlled by a change in diet or short-term use of medication.

It is important to make small changes, so you have a balance and avoid constipation. Giving feedback to your treatment team before each radiotherapy appointment can help them guide you.

Before changing your diet

- Only use this diet sheet when recommended by a radiographer or dietician.
- Drink a total of 2-3 litres of fluids everyday (4-5 pints). This is to replace fluid lost from the body.
- Allow hot drinks to cool before drinking, especially the first one of the day.
- Avoid drinks with a lot of caffeine.
- Make sure you get plenty of rest.
- Avoid highly seasoned or spicy foods.
- Enjoy your meals as much as possible by having a wide variety of foods.
- **Important note for patients with diabetes** - please inform your radiography team if you are diabetic before changing your diet. The advice may need to be tailored to your specific needs.

If your symptoms persist or you want any more information, please speak to your radiographer during your treatment appointment. They can tailor advice as needed and consider the use of medication.

Changing what you eat

Some foods such as those high in fibre and fat can make diarrhoea worse. It can be helpful to reduce the amount of fibre, fat, and spicy food in your diet.

The following list of food may help you decide what to eat. The best way to use this is to slowly start changing your diet until the diarrhoea is controlled. If you find you become constipated, try bringing back some of your normal foods.

	Foods to eat	Foods to avoid
Cereals	Cornflakes, rice-based cereals, porridge.	Wholegrain cereals e.g. wheat-based cereals, muesli, bran, and cereals which contain fruit or nuts.
Dairy products	Natural or flavoured yoghurt without pieces of fruit or nuts, fromage frais, and milk shakes.	Ice cream containing pieces of fruit or nuts and yoghurt with fruit or nuts.
Meat	Lean beef, pork, lamb, poultry, ham, and fish.	Tough stringy meat, meat with a lot of fat, and products made with wholemeal flour e.g. pies.
Eggs	Scrambled, poached, boiled, omelette, egg custard, and soufflé.	Fried egg.
Sugar and preserves	Jelly, jam, marmalade without peel, honey, syrup, and boiled sweets.	Jams/preserves made with seeds or peel, mincemeat, and sweets with fried fruits or nuts
Fruit	Tinned pear and peaches	Fruits with peel or seeds
	Melon, avocado, and ripe bananas	Citrus fruit e.g. lemons, oranges
	One glass of strained juice per day	Pineapple
		Dried fruit
		Tomatoes
Vegetables	Marrow and courgettes	Vegetables with peel on
	Bean sprouts	Cauliflower and broccoli stalks
	Peeled root vegetables - potatoes, carrots swede, and beetroot.	All leafy green vegetables
		Sweet corn, peas
		All salad vegetables e.g. lettuce, celery, radishes
		Pulses e.g. baked beans, lentils, kidney beans
Other	Tea, cocoa, Horlicks, Ovaltine	Coffee
	Squash	Nuts
	Sieved soups, Bovril, Marmite, and gravy.	Fried or greasy food
	Tomato puree	Soup containing vegetables
	Crisps	Pickles and chutney
	White rice, pasta, bread and flour, and cakes made with white flour.	Digestive biscuits, flapjacks, and any biscuits with fruit or nut
		Wholemeal/wholegrain bread, pasta, rice, or flour

After the end of radiotherapy treatment

Radiotherapy side effects can continue for about six weeks after finishing treatment. Continue to follow the advice until the diarrhoea has settled.

If you have any problems or concerns, either contact your GP, telephone the Dorset oncology and radiotherapy advice helpline (DORAH), or for urgent advice the oncology patient hotline.

Radiotherapy Department (Dorset oncology and radiotherapy advice helpline - DORAH)

Tel: **0300 019 2481**

The Dorset radiotherapy helpline (DORAH) is for any advice about any radiotherapy treatment you have had. It is open between 8am to 5.30pm, but a message can be left at any time.

It is important to note that the DORAH helpline is not for emergencies.

Oncology patient hotline

Tel: **0300 019 4302**

This number can be used at all times of the day or night for urgent inquiries. If your call is not answered, please leave a message stating your name, hospital number and contact telephone number. You should be contacted by a nurse within 30 minutes. In the unlikely event that you are not called back within 30 minutes, please **call again**.

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