

DIARRHEA

Treatments for certain medical conditions cause changes in bowel patterns, including frequent, formed bowel movements or diarrhea (frequent, water bowel movements). These may be accompanied by abdominal cramping, increased gas, or mucous discharge from the rectum. Diarrhea causes food to pass quickly through the intestines, so water and nutrients are not adequately absorbed. If diarrhea is severe (more than three watery bowel movements a day) or persists for a long time, you may become dehydrated (lose too much water) and lose weight. Frequent formed bowel movements do not cause dehydration, but they can cause discomfort.

This information describes a diet that is helpful in preventing or treating diarrhea and frequent formed bowel movements. It requires limiting or avoiding foods that may irritate the intestines, increase the bulk in your bowel movements, or increase the movement of food through the intestines.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Drink plenty of liquids during the day (eight to ten 8-oz glasses). Avoid alcohol and liquids with caffeine since they can dehydrate you. Drink small amounts (four ounces) at mealtime to avoid filling up on liquid.
- Eat small amounts of food throughout the day rather than three large meals. Snack midmorning, midafternoon, and in the evening.
- Avoid swallowing air when you eat and drink by chewing with your mouth closed and not using a straw when you drink.

HIGH FIBER FOODS

Fiber is the part of your food that does not get digested or absorbed and forms the bulk that makes your stool. You need to restrict fiber to treat or prevent diarrhea.

FOODS TO AVOID:

Whole grain breads and cereals
Bran
Brown rice
Raw vegetables, including lettuce, cooked vegetables that cause gas (e.g., onion, garlic, cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli)
Fresh and dried fruits
Juice with pulp (e.g., prunes and oranges)
Beans
Peas
Nuts
Seeds
Corn and popcorn

HIGH FAT FOODS

Excessive fat can also contribute to diarrhea. You should limit the amount of butter, margarine, oil and salad dressing you use.

FOODS TO AVOID:

Fried foods
Gravies
Cream sauces
Luncheon meats
Sausages
Olives

FOODS AND LIQUIDS CONTAINING LACTOSE

Lactose is a sugar found in milk and milk products. When your intestines are irritated, lactose may not be completely digested, resulting in gas, cramping and diarrhea.

FOODS TO AVOID:

Milk (whole or skim)
Cream, sour cream and creamy cheeses
Processed cheese
Ice cream, sherbet

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

A number of other foods and liquids may irritate your intestines and cause diarrhea. We recommend that you avoid:

Caffeine
Alcohol
Pepper
Spices
Soy sauce
Very hot beverages
Carbonated beverages
All artificial sweeteners (Splenda, Equal, Sweet'N Low, aspartame, sorbitol, etc)

The following list of foods can take the place of the foods we have suggested you avoid:

PROTEIN:

Tender meats (with the fat trimmed) baked or broiled
Poultry (with the skin removed)
Fish (water-packed if it is canned)
Eggs
Tofu (wrapped only)
Smooth peanut butter

VEGETABLES:

Cooked squash, peeled eggplant, carrots, asparagus, mushrooms, green and wax beans
Potato without the skin
Tomato juice and puree (with pieces of tomato removed)
Vegetable juice

FRUITS AND JUICES:

Bananas
Applesauce
Cooked or canned fruits with the skin and seeds removed (e.g., apples, peaches, apricots, plums, pears, pineapple, fruit cocktail)
Strained cranberry sauce
Fruit juices and nectars without pulp (e.g., apple, grape, cranberry)

BREAD, CEREALS, AND GRAINS:

White and Italian bread, rolls, plain bagels, English muffins
Saltines, graham crackers
Cold cereals (corn flakes, corn Chex, puffed rice, rice Chex, Rice Krispies)
Hot cereals (Cream of Rice, Farina, Cream of Wheat)
White rice
Spaghetti, noodles

DAIRY:

Lactose-free milk
Lactose-free cottage cheese or ice cream
Yogurt
Sorbet

If you change your diet and still have more than three loose, watery bowel movements in a day, let your doctor know, medication may be prescribed. If your diarrhea is severe you should:

- Eliminate all fruits (except bananas and applesauce) and vegetables from your diet
- Drink increased amounts of fluid, especially broth and Gatorade

CONCLUSION

We recommend that you review these guidelines and talk with your doctor and/or a dietitian about how you can individualize them to meet your own needs. Some people will only need to limit certain foods, whereas others may require a very restricted diet. Also, if you are on a special diet, it may be difficult for you to follow these guidelines and still be sure you are getting adequate nutrition. Clinical dietitians are available to counsel you about your diet. If you would like to meet with a dietitian, please let your doctor or nurse know.

We hope these guidelines are helpful to you.