

# Diarrhea

With diarrhea, you have bowel movements often or you have loose liquid stools. Diarrhea most often will last 2 to 3 days. If it lasts longer, it may be a sign of other problems. See your doctor if your diarrhea does not get better in 3 days or if it worsens. For babies and children, see a doctor if diarrhea lasts more than 1 day.

## Causes

- Infections, such as a virus
- Nervousness and stress
- Some medicines such as antibiotics or chemotherapy
- A side effect of some treatments
- Bowel diseases
- Bowel surgery or radiation to the abdomen

Some foods that can cause or make diarrhea worse:

- High fiber foods
- Spicy, fatty or fried food
- Food that is too hot or cold
- Milk and dairy products
- Alcohol
- Drinks or foods with caffeine such as coffee, tea, colas or chocolate
- Nutritional supplements such as Ensure or Boost. If you use a supplement and notice more diarrhea, talk to your nurse, dietitian or doctor.

## Your Care

You need to be sure to keep drinking liquids when you have diarrhea. Eat as long as the foods do not cause more diarrhea or cramping. Try these tips:

- Avoid milk and dairy products until your diarrhea has stopped.

- Drink at least 8 glasses of water each day.
- Eat small meals every 2 to 3 hours during the day.
  - ▶ Eat low fiber foods such as white bread, plain bagels, crackers, white rice, cooked vegetables, cream of wheat cereal or applesauce.
  - ▶ If foods cause cramping, eat a clear liquid diet for a day or two. Drink water, broth, Pedialyte, sports drinks, lemon lime sodas or decaffeinated tea. Plain jello and popsicles can also be eaten.
  - ▶ As your diarrhea gets better, try eating small amounts of bananas, rice, applesauce and toast. If your stools start to firm up again, add soft foods such as mashed potatoes and noodles. Slowly add other foods to your diet to see how your bowels react.
- Get plenty of rest and try to lessen your stress.
- Be sure to wash your hands well after each stool.
- After each stool, wash your rectum with a soft cloth, warm water and mild soap. Rinse with plain warm water and then pat the skin dry.
- Soak in a warm tub of water to ease rectal soreness. Ask your doctor or nurse to suggest an ointment you can use if you get sore.
- Take anti-diarrhea medicine as ordered by your doctor.

**Call your doctor right away if you:**

- Have chills, vomiting or fainting.
- Have a very strong thirst.
- Have a fever over 100.5 degrees F or 38 degrees C.
- Have pain in your stomach that is not eased by passing stool or gas.
- Have stools that are black or have blood in them.
- Feel very weak and tired.

**Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.**