



[cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org) | 1.800.227.2345

---

## Diarrhea

Diarrhea is a common symptom for many people with cancer. It can lead to serious problems or delays in treatment.

- [What is diarrhea?](#)
- [What causes diarrhea?](#)
- [What are symptoms of diarrhea?](#)
- [Treatment for diarrhea](#)
- [Tips for managing diarrhea](#)
- [Talk to your doctor or cancer care team](#)

### What is diarrhea?

When you have more stools in a day than is normal for you it is called diarrhea. is usually loose or watery and you might have aG2Te.42 Tm /F2 12 Tf 0 0 0 rg 5d1 02 0.62745 rg (What

Many people with cancer have diarrhea at some point. Some common causes of diarrhea in people with cancer include:

- Certain cancers like pancreas, gastric, and colorectal  
[Chemotherapy](#)

## Call 911 or go to the emergency room

- If you have bleeding from your rectum that won't stop
- If you have sudden, intense belly pain that won't stop
- If you can't urinate (pee) or eat for a day or more

## Treatment for diarrhea

Managing diarrhea includes treating the cause as well as the symptoms you might be having.

### Medicines

- Diarrhea from an infection might need antibiotics or other medicine. Many doctors also suggest avoiding antidiarrheal medicines if your diarrhea is caused by an infection because it might make the infection last longer.
- Antidiarrheals such as Imodium might be used if the cause of the diarrhea isn't an infection such as *C. diff*.
- Steroids are used for diarrhea caused by immunotherapy.
- If you're very dehydrated from diarrhea, you might also get fluids and electrolytes.

### Food and fluids

#### Avoid these:

- Caffeine and alcohol
- Foods that upset your stomach
- Spicy foods and foods high in fat or sugar
- Acidic drinks, such as tomato juice, citrus juices, prune juice, and fizzy drinks.

#### Try these:

- A clear liquid diet (water, weak tea, apple juice, peach or apricot nectar, clear broth, popsicles, or Jello) when diarrhea starts or when you feel that it's going to start.
- The BRAT diet (bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast) when you're ready to eat solid foods.

- Other good foods to try are potatoes, noodles, pasta, cereal, boiled vegetables, and low-salt soup.

Drink at least 1 cup of liquid (such as water, sports drinks, or bouillon) after each

## Hyperlinks

Krishnamurthi SS and Kamath SK. Chemotherapy-associated diarrhea, constipation, and intestinal perforation: pathogenesis, risk factors, and clinical presentation. *UpToDate*. UpToDate Inc; 2023. Updated November 2023. Accessed December 19, 2023. <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/chemotherapy-associated-diarrhea-constipation-and-intestinal-perforation-pathogenesis-risk-factors-and-clinical-presentation>

Lamont JT, Bakken JS, and Kelly CP. *Clostridioides difficile* infection in adults: Epidemiology, microbiology, and pathophysiology. *UpToDate*. UpToDate Inc; 2023. Updated January 2023. Accessed December 19, 2023. <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/clostridioides-difficile-infection-in-adults-epidemiology-microbiology-and-pathophysiology>

Nielsen DL, Juhl CB, Chen IM, Kellermann L, Nielsen OH. Immune checkpoint Inhibitor-Induced diarrhea and Colitis: Incidence and Management. A systematic review and Meta-analysis. *Cancer Treat Rev*. 2022;109:102440. doi:10.1016/j.ctrv.2022.102440

Last Revised: April 22, 2024

## Written by

The American Cancer Society medical and editorial content team  
(<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/acs-medical-content-and-news-staff.html>)

Our team is made up of doctors and oncology certified nurses with deep knowledge of cancer care as well as editors and translators with extensive experience in medical writing.

American Cancer Society medical information is copyrighted material. For reprint requests, please see our Content Usage Policy ([www.cancer.org/about-us/policies/content-usage.html](http://www.cancer.org/about-us/policies/content-usage.html)).

**cancer.org | 1.800.227.2345**