

# Your Pathway for Managing Chronic Diarrhea (adults)

## What is chronic diarrhea?

- Means loose or watery stool.
- Often associated with an increase in frequency.
- Symptoms can also include an urgent need to pass stool and occasional incontinence.
- It is normal to have up to 3 bowel movements per day.
- It affects approximately 3-5% of the population.
- It can affect your every day activities and have a negative impact on quality of life.
- Usually cared for by healthcare providers in your family doctor's office.

## What is the chronic diarrhea patient pathway?

It is a map for you and your healthcare providers to follow. It makes sure the care you are getting for chronic diarrhea is safe and helpful in managing your symptoms.

You and your healthcare providers may modify the pathway to best suit your healthcare needs.

If symptoms cannot be managed over time, you and your healthcare providers may decide a referral to a specialist would be helpful.

### 1. Check your symptoms

- Loose watery stool that last for more than 4 weeks

### 2. Make lifestyle changes to manage your symptoms (see over for details)

- Adjust or stop use of certain medicines
- Identify foods that cause symptoms and try to limit or avoid them
- Eat smaller meals throughout the day
- Increase your soluble fibre intake. Eat foods like oats, flax, chia, and barley.
- Make sure to get plenty of water daily
- Try to get at least 20 minutes of physical activity daily. Aim for 150 minutes each week.
- Identify what causes you stress and find ways to reduce it

### 3. Tests that may be done

- Blood or stool tests
- Test to rule out celiac disease
  - Make sure your diet includes gluten (e.g. white or whole wheat bread) for at least two weeks before testing

## Tell your healthcare providers if you have these symptoms:

- Family history of colon cancer
- Losing weight without meaning to
- Symptoms that often wake you up at night
- Stool that is black in colour or has blood in it

Talk to your healthcare providers if your symptoms don't improve, get worse, or keep interfering with your everyday activities

Once you find something that works for you, stick with it.

You may need to keep trying other options to find what works best to manage your symptoms.



### 4. Medicine that may be tried

- Many options can be used to improve your symptoms
- Talk with your healthcare providers about what medicines may be right for you

# What do I need to know about my symptoms and chronic diarrhea?

## Working through the chronic diarrhea patient pathway can take several months:

- Your healthcare providers will ask you questions about your health and do a physical exam. They will also review any medicines you are taking.
- They may suggest certain tests to learn more about possible causes of your symptoms.
- They will talk with you about possible lifestyle habits that may be causing your symptoms and how you can make changes that could help you feel better.
- You may find it helpful to write down your symptoms and what seems to cause them (e.g. certain food or stress). You and your healthcare providers can make a plan to help manage your symptoms using this information.
- Together, you may decide to try certain medicines to help in treating your symptoms.
- You may use medicines for a short amount of time (or possibly longer) depending on whether your symptoms improve.

## To manage your symptoms, try to:

- Identify foods that cause your symptoms. You may want to keep track of the foods you eat and how they affect your diarrhea.
- Get at least 20 minutes of physical activity daily. Aim for 150 minutes each week (e.g. walking, biking, gardening, stairs, or your favourite sports).
- Choose high soluble fibre foods like oats, flax, chia, and barley. Slowly increase the amount of fibre you eat. Target 25 g for females and 38 g for males.
- Consider the use of a psyllium fibre supplement (e.g. Metamucil).
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day.
- Identify what causes you stress and work on reducing it. You may want to try yoga, meditation, counselling, or a stress reduction program.

## Seeing a specialist is only recommended if:

- Your symptoms continue or get worse after following treatment and management options in the chronic diarrhea pathway.
- You and your healthcare providers identify concerning symptoms or test results.

## You can find more information in the great resources below:


- Canadian Digestive Health Foundation [cdhf.ca](http://cdhf.ca)  
\* search Diarrhea
- My Health Alberta [myhealth.alberta.ca](http://myhealth.alberta.ca)  
\* search Diarrhea
- Alberta Healthy Living Program [ahs.ca/info/page13984.aspx](http://ahs.ca/info/page13984.aspx)
  - Workshops on chronic pain and stress reduction
- Nutrition Education Materials [ahs.ca/NutritionResources](http://ahs.ca/NutritionResources)

## Write any notes or questions you may have here:

Please provide feedback about this patient pathway by completing a short [survey](https://bit.ly/DHSCNsurvey) (bit.ly/DHSCNsurvey) or email us at [Digestivehealth.SCN@ahs.ca](mailto:Digestivehealth.SCN@ahs.ca)



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