

# Managing Your Diarrhea with Nutrition During Radiation Treatment

## What is diarrhea?

Diarrhea is having 4 or more loose or liquid bowel movements (poops) a day. This is a common side effect of radiation treatment.



Diarrhea may cause you to:



- lose weight
- become dehydrated
- have sore skin around your rectum

Diarrhea can also affect how the doctor is able to give the radiation dose.

## How can I manage my diarrhea?

You may need to change the way you eat and drink. Certain foods, fluids, and ways of eating can firm up your stools and help you to poop less.

Here are some ideas to try:

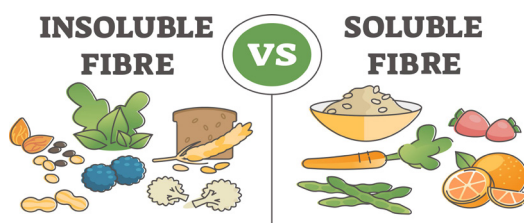
	
<p>If you eat a lot at just one meal, your body has to work harder to digest (break down) the food.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try eating a small meal or snack every 2 to 3 hours in the day</li> <li>• Change how much and what kind of dietary fibre you eat</li> </ul>	<p>Unless you have been told to drink less fluids, sip these fluids all day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• water</li> <li>• milk or milk alternatives (non-dairy)</li> <li>• broth</li> <li>• sports drinks such as Gatorade®</li> </ul>

## What is dietary fibre?

Dietary fibre is the part of the plant that our bodies can't digest. Eating fibre keeps your digestive tract (gut) healthy.

There are 2 types of fibre you can eat — the kind that holds water (soluble), and the kind that does not hold water (insoluble).

**Soluble fibre** mixes with water. This fibre will firm up your poop and slow down how fast it moves through your gut.



These foods have **soluble fibre** in them:

- Peeled apples or applesauce
- Bananas
- Barley, oatmeal, or oat bran
- Potatoes and sweet potatoes - no skin
- Avocado
- Smooth peanut butter
- Psyllium fibre
- Soft, cooked vegetables or fruits, with skins and seeds removed

Ask your doctor if a soluble fibre supplement is right for you.

**Insoluble fibre** does not hold water. It also doesn't break down easily, so it makes you poop more.

Here are some **insoluble fibre** foods:

- Vegetables and fruits with tough skins, and/or lots of seeds
- Cabbage, Brussels sprouts, or broccoli
- Leafy greens and raw vegetables



**If you have diarrhea, limit insoluble fibre or you will poop even more**

### What else should I limit or avoid?

Some foods and fluids may make your diarrhea worse.

They move quickly through your gut which makes you poop more.

Limit or avoid these during treatment:

Sugary drinks	Spicy, oily, or fried foods	Caffeine	Alcohol
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• pop</li><li>• juice</li><li>• energy drinks like Red Bull®</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• hot sauce</li><li>• chilies</li><li>• deep-fried foods</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• coffee</li><li>• tea</li><li>• colas</li><li>• energy drinks</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• beer</li><li>• wine</li><li>• cider</li><li>• spirits</li></ul>

### What about dairy products?

Dairy products like milk, cheese, and ice cream do not cause digestive problems for everyone. If you ate dairy and had no problems before you got diarrhea, you can still eat and drink dairy.

But, if you get gas, bloating, or diarrhea 30 to 60 minutes after eating or drinking dairy, you may be lactose intolerant (can't digest dairy). If this happens, you may want to limit or avoid dairy products.

Nutrition supplement drinks like Ensure® are an option for people with lactose intolerance.

### How long do I follow this advice?

The tips in this resource should be used until your diarrhea stops. When it stops, you can eat and drink the same way you used to. Try to choose foods that are healthy for you.

If you still have diarrhea even after you follow this guide, talk with your radiation therapist, nurse, or doctor. They can refer you to a registered dietitian.

[www.cancercarealberta.ca](http://www.cancercarealberta.ca)

