

Nutrition Management of Diarrhea

This information is for the management of diarrhea caused by medical treatments or health conditions. If you have diarrhea from a virus, food poisoning, or from travelling, search “diarrhea” on [MyHealth Alberta](#) for information.

What is diarrhea?

Diarrhea is having loose, watery, or liquid poop 4 or more times a day. Diarrhea can be a side effect of certain medical treatments, like chemotherapy, or a symptom of other health conditions, like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Aside from causing you discomfort, diarrhea can cause dehydration, weight loss, and sore skin.

You may need to make changes to what you eat and drink to thicken your poop to help reduce your diarrhea.



Contact your healthcare team if you:

- are 50 years of age or older and having chronic diarrhea for the first time
- have a family history of inflammatory bowel disease or colorectal cancer
- have lost weight without trying
- see blood in your diarrhea
- wake up at night because of diarrhea

Tips to try

Certain foods, fluids, and eating patterns can help reduce your diarrhea.

Here are some ideas to try:

- Eat 5–6 small meals, more often. Aim to eat a small meal or snack every 2–3 hours during the day. Large amounts of food may be hard to tolerate when your gut is feeling unwell.
- Change how much and the kind of fibre you eat.
- Sip on fluids throughout the day to keep hydrated, unless you have been told to restrict or limit your fluids.

Fibre

Fibre is the part of the plant that our bodies are unable to breakdown. It is important for our gut health. Foods with fibre include:

- fruits
- grains
- legumes (beans and lentils)
- nuts and seeds
- vegetables

There are 2 main types of dietary fibre: soluble and insoluble.

Soluble fibre absorbs water and forms a gel-like consistency. This helps to thicken your poop and slow how quickly it moves through your gut.

Foods with soluble fibre include:

- avocado
- bananas
- barley, oatmeal, and oat bran
- peeled apples or applesauce
- potatoes & sweet potatoes, no skin
- smooth peanut butter
- soft, cooked vegetables or fruits with skins & seeds removed
- psyllium fibre supplements – speak with your healthcare team to ask if a soluble fibre supplement is right for you.

Insoluble fibre does not absorb water. It is often called “roughage” and has a bulking effect. It stimulates your gut which can make diarrhea worse.

Examples of insoluble foods include:

- cabbage, Brussels sprouts, and broccoli
- leafy greens and raw vegetables
- vegetables and fruits with tough skins or seeds
- whole grain foods, and wheat and corn bran
- whole nuts and seeds

Drink enough fluids daily

Sip on fluids throughout the day to stay hydrated.

Fluids include water and other liquids such as oral rehydration solutions (like Pedialyte® or G2®), milk, fortified soy beverage, tea, and broth.

Diarrhea can cause you to lose fluid more easily and raises your risk of dehydration. Dehydration is when your body doesn't get enough fluid.

Watch for signs of dehydration

These include:

- dry mouth
- dry skin
- headaches
- feeling thirsty
- feeling dizzy
- low blood pressure
- nausea
- muscle cramping
- peeing less or dark pee
- weight loss

If you think you may be dehydrated, try to drink more water or oral rehydration solution, and monitor your symptoms. **If they do not improve, contact your healthcare team.**

Visit ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts for oral rehydration solution recipes you can make at home.

Food and fluids to limit or avoid

Certain food and drinks may make your diarrhea worse. Limit or avoid:

- any amount or type of alcohol
- coffee, tea, colas, and energy drinks that have caffeine
 - decaffeinated coffee or tea is okay
- oily, fried, or deep-fried foods
- spicy foods if you aren't used to eating them
- sugar-sweetened drinks, such as pop, juice, and energy drinks.

Dairy products

Dairy products, like milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream do not cause digestive problems for everyone.

If you have lactose intolerance (gas, bloating, or diarrhea after eating or drinking dairy), limit dairy to what you can tolerate or avoid it.

If you had dairy products with no symptoms of diarrhea before, you may continue to eat or drink them.

Only avoid or limit dairy products if you develop diarrhea within about 30–60 minutes of eating or drinking it.

Store-bought nutrition supplement drinks are suitable for people with lactose intolerance.

How long do I follow this advice?

Use the ideas in this resource until your diarrhea stops.

Once you no longer are having diarrhea, you can go back to your usual way of eating.

If you are still having diarrhea after trying the suggestions, speak with your healthcare team.

For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](https://ahs.ca/811) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit ahs.ca/Nutrition.
- Call, text, or chat with 211 Alberta (ab.211.ca/) to find out about financial benefits, programs, and services.

