

# Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea usually means that you need to poo more in a day than you normally do, and the stools you pass are looser than normal.

Chemotherapy, radiotherapy, targeted therapies and surgery can all cause diarrhoea. These treatments can affect the healthy cells that line the digestive tract, which causes diarrhoea. Sometimes an infection or other medications, such as antibiotics, can also cause diarrhoea.

Diarrhoea can be a temporary, mild side effect. But for some people, it can be severe and they will need to see a doctor to help manage it. Tell your doctor if you have diarrhoea or if it is getting worse. They can find out the cause, and prescribe anti-diarrhoea medicines.

If your diarrhoea is caused by radiotherapy or chemotherapy, just changing your diet is unlikely to help. It is important to take the anti-diarrhoea medicines prescribed by your doctor. If you have diarrhoea after surgery for bowel cancer, talk to your doctor or specialist nurse before changing your diet.

**Sometimes diarrhoea can be severe. It is important to contact the hospital if this happens. If you have more than 4 to 6 episodes of diarrhoea a day, contact the hospital on the telephone numbers you have been given and speak to a doctor or nurse.**

## Tips to help with diarrhoea

- Drink plenty of liquids (at least 2 litres or 3.5 pints a day) to replace the fluid lost with the diarrhoea.
- Avoid drinking alcohol and coffee.
- Eat small, frequent meals made from light foods. For example, white fish, poultry, well-cooked eggs, white bread, pasta or rice.
- Eat your meals slowly.
- Eat less fibre (for example cereals, raw fruits and vegetables) until the diarrhoea improves.
- Avoid greasy, fatty foods such as chips and beef burgers, and spicy foods like chilli peppers.

Antibiotics can kill off the healthy bacteria normally found in the bowel, but the bacteria found in live yoghurt or yoghurt drinks may replace them. This may help ease diarrhoea caused by antibiotics. But you should avoid live yoghurt while you are having chemotherapy or if your immunity is low.

### Access to public toilets

If you have bowel problems, knowing you may need to get to a toilet quickly can make you worry about going out. We can send you a Macmillan Toilet Card, which you can show to people if you need to get to a toilet quickly while you are out.

**Local resources:**

Resource	Contact details

**National resources:**

Resource	Contact details
Bladder and Bowel Community	<p><a href="http://www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org">www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org</a></p> <p><b>Tel</b> 0845 345 0165</p> <p><b>Email</b> <a href="mailto:help@bladderandbowelcommunity.org">help@bladderandbowelcommunity.org</a></p>

**Further information**

- **MAC13613** Eating problems and cancer
- **MAC11671** Managing the symptoms of cancer
- [macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/eating-problems/diarrhoea](http://macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/eating-problems/diarrhoea)

**More information and support**

More than one in three of us will get cancer. For most of us it will be the toughest fight we ever face. And the feelings of isolation and loneliness that so many people experience make it even harder. But you don't have to go through it alone. The Macmillan team is with you every step of the way.

Visit [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk) or call us on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.

Hard of hearing? Use textphone **0808 808 0121**, or Text Relay. Speak another language? We have telephone interpreters. We provide information in a range of languages and formats. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](http://macmillan.org.uk/otherformats) or call us.