



Montana Cancer Center

MANAGING SIDE EFFECTS: DIARRHEA

Diarrhea may occur when fast growing cells of the bowel are injured by chemotherapy or radiation therapy. Symptoms of diarrhea include frequent, loose, watery stools. This can lead to dehydration, weakness and sore skin around the rectum.

Suggestions to help you manage diarrhea:

- Drink 8 glasses of fluid per day, two of these should be a sports drink like Gatorade.
- Avoid alcohol and foods and beverages that contain caffeine such as cola, coffee or cocoa as these stimulate the bowel and remove fluid from the body.
- Allow carbonated drinks to "lose their fizz" before you drink them. Heating them for a minute in the microwave and adding ice will assist.
- Eat small frequent meals.
- You may tolerate warm foods better than hot or cold foods.
- Eat foods that are easily digested such as eggs, rice, yogurt, broth, applesauce, boiled or baked chicken and fish, pasta, and canned or cooked fruits or vegetables.
- Avoid spicy, fatty or fibrous foods and **milk or milk products**.
- If diarrhea is severe, your doctor may ask you to follow a clear liquid diet for 12 to 24 hours. This will mean limiting your diet to gelatin, broth, weak tea, apple juice and other "clear" beverages.
- With your physician's permission, you may use over-the counter anti-diarrhea medications, such as Imodium A-D.
- Clean the skin and mucous membranes in the rectal area with mild soap and warm water after each bowel movement. Warm sitz baths, baby wipes with aloe, or personal hygiene wipes such as Tucks may be helpful.

Notify your physician:

- If you have five or more watery stools per day.
- If you experience uncontrolled abdominal cramping.
- If you fail to urinate or urinate minimally over 8 hours (approximately less than a cup).
- If you become dizzy or light headed upon standing.
- If your skin breaks down in the groin or rectal area.