
Diarrhea

Nutrition Fact Sheet

Definition: Diarrhea can be defined as bowel movements that occur too often and that are too loose. The average number of regular bowel movements varies greatly from 3-21 times per week. What is your normal bowel habit?

Consequences: Decreased appetite, malabsorption of nutrients and drugs, contributing to malnutrition, weight loss, and wasting and possible drug failure. Persistent diarrhea may lead to dehydration, electrolyte imbalance, hospitalization and death. Until diarrhea is controlled, good nutrition and hydration is absolutely necessary.

Causes of diarrhea could be from:

- Changes in the gastrointestinal tract from HIV infection
- Infections that injure the bowel (parasitic, bacterial, viral)
- A number of drugs
- Difficulty absorbing fats
- Lactose intolerance (problems with milk products)
- Mega dose of vitamin C (might see if more than 1000 mg taken at one time)
- Food sensitivity (ex: raw fruits or vegetables, fatty foods: bacon, fried foods, gravies, sauces)
- Stress
- Drinking supplements or other concentrated beverages too fast

Let your doctor know about the state of your bowel movements and when they changed. Call your doctor if you have diarrhea that persists for three days so that the cause can be determined. A doctor should be notified when diarrhea persists two days for a baby under twelve months old.

Even if it is not clear why diarrhea is occurring, there are dietary changes you can make.

Tips to control diarrhea

- If having severe diarrhea, allow your bowel to rest for 24 hours and only have clear fluids that have some calories.

Avoid foods that can increase diarrhea. Problem foods can include the following:

- Fatty, greasy and fried foods. Choose a baked potato over French fries, hard-boiled egg over scrambled and broiled chicken over fried chicken. Reducing the amount of fat eaten at one time can make a big difference.
- Spicy or overly sweet foods: Cajun, curries, chili peppers, or candy bars, glazed donuts, soda, juices, etc.
- Caffeinated foods and drinks: chocolate, coffee, strong teas, colas and others containing caffeine
- Foods high in bulk and roughage, such as bran, whole grain cereals and breads, popcorn, nuts, seeds and skins, raw vegetables and fruits, and gas producing foods: cauliflower, beans, bell peppers, onions and cabbage.
- Milk products – you may have developed an inability to digest the sugar in milk called lactose. This condition is called lactose intolerance. Symptoms of lactose intolerance are stomach distention, bloating, gas and diarrhea. This problem may come and go. Some products are worse than others. Fluid milk may be difficult, though yogurt with live cultures may be fine. Sometimes smaller amounts of milk may be okay, for example, ¼ to ½ cup at a time.
- Medications can contain lactose and can cause gas, bloating, diarrhea. Try Lactaid or Dairy ease tablets.
- Drinking liquid nutritional supplements, especially quickly and on an empty stomach, can cause diarrhea and nausea.
- Cigarette smoking and alcoholic beverages may also make diarrhea worse.



Keep trying to adjust your diet to reduce your diarrhea. Consider these recommendations:

For more information contact:

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- Drink fluids. Drink 10–12 eight ounce glasses per day.
- Drink between meals. Try mild liquids like diluted fruit juices or fruit drinks or defizzed fruit flavored sodas, sports drinks, rice water, weak tea, soups and broth.
- Rice drinks, like horchata, can be purchased in many stores in the LA area or made easily: 1 cup white rice into 6 cups of boiling water, reduce to a simmer until rice is cooked. Blend the rice and add flavorings, like sugar, cinnamon, and lemon rind, to taste.



Rice soups, like congee, a classic Chinese dish, are easy to make and serves the same purpose as horchata. Combine 1 cup of washed short grain rice and 8 cups of water in a large saucepan with a tight-fitting lid. Bring to a boil, cover, and reduce heat to simmer. Cook for 1 1/2 hours. Serve hot. You can add salt and pepper to taste. Also as tolerated, you can add and cook till hot vegetables like spinach, tomatoes, or scallion, and tofu or an egg, slightly beaten then thoroughly cooked.

- Electrolyte solutions and drinks. Oral rehydration therapy (ORT) drink can be easily made and taken: 1 quart of water, 1 teaspoon salt, 4 teaspoons sugar, and 1 heaping teaspoon of baking soda, boiled for 3–5 minutes, refrigerated and then flavored with lemon, lime or fruit juice. Purchase commercial electrolyte replacement (*Pedialyte, Infalyte, Ceralyte, Gatorade*).
- Try lactose free milk or lactase enzymes preparations such as Lactaid® or Dairy Ease tablets to digest lactose. Test your ability to handle lactose after the diarrhea subsides by adding those problem foods a little at a time.

Eat small, frequent meals. 6–8 small meals will be easier than 3 larger ones.

- Add the BRATT diet to your fluid routine: Every 1/2 hour or so eat small servings of bananas, 1/2 cup boiled white rice, 1/2 cup applesauce, 1 slice of dry white toasted bread, or caffeine-free tea.
- Add other easy to digest foods: mashed potatoes, cream of rice or wheat, dry crackers, flavored gelatin, broth, cooked carrots, or yogurt with live cultures.
- Add other low fiber foods that are soft and easy to digest: noodles, hard boiled eggs, saltine crackers, rice-cakes, etc.
- Foods with soluble fiber can actually help: white rice, oatmeal, apple sauce, fruits and vegetables without skin, like apples, grapes, apricots, pears, and peaches, potato, sweet potato, carrots, unseasoned split pea soup, etc. Psyllium, Metamucil, Fibercon and other bulking agents are formulated in powders, bars, and capsules and can be purchased over the counter. Start with a small dose.
- Try enteric-coated Lactobacillus acidophilus tablets.

Below are other treatments that might lessen diarrhea. Consult with your doctor.

- Pancreatic Enzymes: Sometimes diarrhea is due to an absorption problem sometimes due to enzyme deficiencies. Pancreatic enzymes are available through prescription, buyers clubs, or health food stores.
- L-glutamine: Typical recommendations for glutamine may be 0.4g/kg up to 30g/day for about 5–14 days, followed by 5–10g/day. Best to take without food. (Do not use with endstage liver or kidney disease.)

Speak to you doctor about other medications to control diarrhea.

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