

## diarrhoea

Diarrhoea is characterised by an increase in the volume, frequency (more than 3 per day), and water content of bowel movements. Generally acute diarrhoea lasts for two to three days, whereas chronic diarrhoea can last for four weeks or more. Diarrhoea can cause dehydration, poor absorption of food and weight loss. Dehydration is not just the loss of water in the body but the loss of the body's electrolytes (particularly sodium and potassium). Significant weight loss from diarrhoea can result in weakness and further illness. Diarrhoea is one of the most common side effects in positive people. There are many causes of diarrhoea including different medications so it is important to consider steps to minimise these.

The symptoms of diarrhoea include:

- Urgency to go to the toilet
- Passing of frequent, loose, watery stools
- Abdominal cramps and pains

Appearance of the following means you should consult your medical or health professional:

- Fever (temperature more than 38°C)
- Blood in the stool
- Repeated vomiting
- Inability to increase fluid intake
- Reduced or absent urination
- Persistent diarrhoea that fails to resolve in a few days

The causes of diarrhoea can be:

- Food poisoning
- Stress
- Bacterial, viral or other infection
- Intestinal parasites
- Pancreatic disease
- Certain foods that the body cannot tolerate such as - caffeine, wheat, red wine, cheese, chocolate, dairy products, fats
- The use of certain antiretroviral drugs such as:
  - nelfinavir (Viracept)
  - ritonavir (Norvir),
  - indinavir (Crixivan)
  - saquinavir (Fortovase)
  - amprenavir (Agenerase)
  - ddI (Videx)
  - ddC (Hivid)
  - d4T (Zerit)
  - 3TC (EpiVir, Combivir and Trizivir)
  - abacavir (Ziagen and Trizivir)
  - nevirapine (Viramune)
  - efavirenz (Sustiva)

Diarrhoea which starts or worsens with the introduction of a new medication could be caused by that medication. Occasionally the diarrhoea will decrease with time and exposure to that drug. If the diarrhoea becomes a problem, it may be possible to change medications, but

you should never stop your medications unless you have been advised to by your medical or health professional.

Diarrhoea can be due to one or more causes, so you need to be vigilant with hygiene, stress management (refer to Emotion link), exposure to infections and food allergies.

When you have acute diarrhoea you should avoid:

- Coffee and other caffeinated beverages
- Alcohol
- Dairy products (milk or cheeses)
- Greasy, fatty or fried food
- Spicy foods
- Foods high in 'insoluble' fibre including raw fruits or vegetables, whole wheat bread, corn, or any fruit or vegetable skins or seeds
- Chocolate
- Food or drink with high sugar content
- Allergy foods known to the individual

To assist recovery from a bout of diarrhoea try foods such as:

- Bananas
- Plain white rice
- Apple sauce
- Toasted white bread or plain crackers
- Plain macaroni or noodles
- Boiled eggs
- Oatmeal
- Mashed potatoes
- Natural yoghurt
- Peppermint or ginger tea
- It may be necessary to use oral rehydration salt solutions especially with severe dehydration. (Gatorade is often recommended but it is not a very concentrated source of the minerals and it contains a high proportion of sugar, which could make the diarrhoea worse!). Gastrolyte and Hydralyte are better choices but consult your medical or health professional for further advice.

## diarrhoea (contd.)

There are some pharmaceutical medications available over the counter which can help to relieve diarrhoea. Consult your medical or health professional to make sure they do not interact with your other prescribed medications.

Additional supplements that are available over the counter:

- Acidophilus capsules (which contain helpful bacteria) can help restore normal digestion. These helpful bacteria are often 'killed off' by the use of antibiotics.

- Soluble fibre - adds bulk and absorbs water, decreases the speed of the passage of food.
- Pancreatic enzyme formulas (it can assist with the digestion of fats).

Any additional supplements considered for treatment should be discussed for suitability with your medical or health care professional as there may be interactions with other medications.

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*The information provided assists in self-management and is intended as recommendations only. For more information please see your medical or health professional.*



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