

Information Sheet: Cancer Treatment & Diarrhoea

During some treatments, the lining of the bowel may become irritated and sensitive, causing short-term changes to how your bowel works. The changes depend on the type of treatment you are having and may vary from person to person.

Some chemotherapy can lead to discomfort in the stomach area (like cramps or wind pains), fluid, pale bowel motions and more wind than usual. These changes, which may occur shortly after the start of treatment, generally correct themselves within a week or so of completing treatment.

Episodes of more frequent fluid motions - diarrhoea, are common. Loose motions and diarrhoea may stem from things like radiotherapy to the pelvis, some chemotherapy drugs or other medications such as antibiotics, anxiety, infection, a change in diet, or an allergy to a food. Replacing the fluid lost from your body as a result of the diarrhoea is very important.

How can I help to manage diarrhoea?

If you experience any of the above:

- ❖ Eat fewer high fibre foods such as wholegrain products, raw fruit and vegetables. You could replace brown bread with white bread and replace muesli with cornflakes. Eat rice, pasta and potatoes without skins.
- ❖ Avoid eating fatty or fried foods: have tender lean meats or fish instead.
- ❖ Drink plenty of fluids so that you don't become dehydrated. Drink fluids between meals so as not to overload your stomach. About 8 glasses of fluid a day is ideal. The best types of fluid to drink are water, herbal teas, sports drinks and electrolyte replacing fluids (e.g. Gastrolyte).
- ❖ Avoid caffeine, alcohol and drinks that are very hot or very cold. Have your fluids warm or cool - fluids that are too hot or too cold may cause bowel actions or stomach cramps.
- ❖ Avoid spicy foods for the same reasons as above.
- ❖ Have small amounts of dairy foods. Try soy or lactose reduced milks instead. Cheese and yogurts in small amounts are usually OK.

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- ❖ Eat slowly in a relaxed setting.
- ❖ Try eating small snacks regularly throughout the day rather than big meals as this will help reduce pressure on the bowel.
- ❖ Only take anti-diarrhoea medications as prescribed by your doctor.

Once your bowels have returned to normal, it is very important that you resume a balanced diet that includes fresh fruits, vegetables and wholegrain cereals.

Notify your Doctor or Nurse if:

- You have unexplained diarrhoea that persists for more than a couple of days or causes you discomfort or distress or;
- You follow the above advice for several days and your diarrhoea persists.

Contact your GP/Oncologist Rooms/Emergency Department if:

- You have persisting uncontrolled diarrhoea **and** feel dizzy or lightheaded when standing (you may be dehydrated)

We encourage you to speak with your healthcare team if you have any concerns about diarrhoea during your treatment

We welcome feedback at:

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The information in this brochure is intended as a guide to one of the services provided by BRHS and is correct at the time of publishing. Adapted from Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre brochure.

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Bairnsdale Regional Health Service is located on the traditional land of the Gunai Kurnai people.

My team **is** **BRHS**