

## What to do when you have loose stools (diarrhea)



“Diarrhea kept me from going out and doing things. My nurse told me how important it was to drink more liquids. Drinking more water and avoiding certain foods helped me feel a lot better.”

### What is diarrhea?

Do you have bowel movements more often than normal? Are they soft, loose, or watery? Then you may have diarrhea.

- **Call your doctor or nurse if you have diarrhea, stomach pain, or feel dizzy.**
- **Ask about foods and medicine that can help.**

### Take these steps to feel better:

#### Drink more liquids each day.

Drinking will help you feel better. Although it won't stop the diarrhea, it will help prevent dehydration (loss of too much water from the body).

- Drink lots of clear liquids, such as water, ginger ale, and clear soup.
- Most people who have diarrhea need to drink 8 to 12 cups of liquid each day. Ask your doctor or nurse how much you should drink.

#### Eat small meals that are easy on your stomach.

- Eat small meals throughout the day, instead of 3 large meals.
- Your doctor or nurse may suggest the **BRAT** foods. BRAT stands for:
  - B**ananas
  - R**ice
  - A**pplesauce
  - T**oast

#### Limit or avoid foods and drinks that can make your diarrhea worse.

- **Don't** eat spicy, greasy, or fried foods.
- **Don't** have milk or dairy products such as cheese or ice cream. Check food labels to see if milk products are listed.
- **Don't** have drinks with caffeine or alcohol.
- You may need to avoid or have less raw fruit, vegetables, and whole wheat breads and cereals.
- Ask your doctor or nurse what foods you may need to avoid.

**These foods and drinks may be easy on your stomach until you feel better:**

Soups (clear liquids)	Drinks (clear liquids)	Meals and snacks	Fruits and other foods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear broth, such as chicken, vegetable, and beef</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear soda, such as ginger ale</li> <li>• Cranberry or grape juice</li> <li>• Oral rehydration solution drinks, such as Pedialyte®</li> <li>• Tea</li> <li>• Water</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chicken—broiled or baked, without the skin</li> <li>• Crackers</li> <li>• Cream of wheat or rice cereal</li> <li>• Noodles</li> <li>• Oatmeal</li> <li>• Potatoes—boiled, without the skin</li> <li>• Pretzels</li> <li>• White rice</li> <li>• White toast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applesauce</li> <li>• Bananas</li> <li>• Canned fruit, such as peaches and pears</li> <li>• Gelatin (such as Jell-O®)</li> </ul> <p><b>Most canned or cooked fruits and vegetables without seeds or skins are easy on your stomach.</b></p> 

**Taking care of your bottom (rectal area):**

- Use a baby wipe that is alcohol free and unscented.
- It may help to sit in a shallow, warm bath (sitz bath).
- Let your doctor or nurse know if your rectal area is sore or bleeds.

**Questions to ask your doctor or nurse:**

1. What problems should I call you about?
2. How much liquid should I drink each day?
3. What foods and drinks should I limit or avoid?
4. What are oral rehydration solution drinks? Where can I find them?
5. What is a sitz bath? Should I take these?
6. What products can I use if my bottom is sore or bleeds? What should I not use?



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**How can we help?**

**National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service**

**Phone:** 1-800-422-6237 (1-800-4-CANCER)

**Web:** [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

**Online Chat:** [www.cancer.gov/livehelp](http://www.cancer.gov/livehelp)

**NCI has a series of 9 Radiation Therapy Side Effects Fact Sheets at:**  
[www.cancer.gov/radiation-side-effects](http://www.cancer.gov/radiation-side-effects)

