



Dealing with Diarrhea

Diarrhea, or multiple loose stools a day, is the most common side effect reported by our clients. Diarrhea can be caused by a wide variety of things including infections, food intolerances, long-term antibiotic use, stress, and bowel disorders. Even though diarrhea is very common, it should not be considered a normal part of living with a chronic illness. There are ways to manage it so you can maintain your quality of life and get the most out of your medications. Whatever the cause, it is important to take your medications, even if diarrhea develops, in order to prevent medication resistance.

Talk with a Dietitian about ideas for controlling diarrhea, especially if you are losing weight. If your diarrhea is severe or continues for more than a couple days, talk to your medical provider to rule out any serious medical causes and see if they can give you a prescription to help stop diarrhea that only happens every once in a while.

For a do-it-yourself approach, try each of the items and food recommendations below for at least a week to see if they can help reduce chronic diarrhea. If you are still suffering after trying all of them and your medical provider has not found any infectious causes, seeking help from a Dietitian specializing in chronic illnesses, such as the Dietitians at Chicken Soup Brigade, should be your next step.

- ✓ **Bulk fiber supplements** – like Metamucil® and Citrucel® or oat bran tablets help absorb excess water and firm the stools. Take the supplement with less water than is recommended on the label and also eat soluble fiber rich foods (see below) for maximum benefit.
- ✓ **Probiotics** – are friendly bacteria that normally live in your intestines and can be killed off with long term antibiotic use or a poor diet. Yogurt doesn't contain enough of the right probiotics so try a good quality supplement. Probiotics live off the fiber you eat and produce chemicals that help digest your food and keep your intestinal cells healthy. Most products contain a mix of species such as: Lactobacillus acidophilus, Bifidobacterium, and Lactobacillus rhamnosus. Saccharomyces boulardi pills may also help as well as Culturelle®, a product available at many drug stores that contains the well tested strain Lactobacillus GG. Look for a product with at least 5-10 BILLION cells in it, not just millions.
- ✓ **L-glutamine** – is a building block of protein that is needed in larger amounts in times of intestinal stress. It is also a fuel for your immune system. Try 5-10 grams a day a few minutes before breakfast and dinner, up to 30 grams a day if the diarrhea is really bad. Buy it as a powder to get the most for your money, and make sure to only mix it in cool liquids like yogurt or juice.
- ✓ **Calcium** supplements – taken at each meal could help reduce diarrhea, especially if you are taking Nevirapine. Make sure you take vitamins with enough Zinc, Magnesium, and Vitamin D though since high doses of calcium can sometimes interfere with absorption of these important minerals.
- ✓ **Pancreatic enzymes** – are most helpful if you see a large amount of undigested food in your diarrhea or an oily sheen on the toilet bowl water. Get prescription enzymes like Pocreacarb MS-8® or Creon® since the ones you can buy in the store are generally overpriced and not very effective. A buffered enzyme product may be even more helpful if your intestines are more acidic than normal which is possible with some medication regimens.

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR DIETARY TIPS TO REDUCE DIARRHEA

Here are some of the effective dietary tips to help relieve diarrhea. Some dietary changes will only need to be temporary while your intestines heal, others may be more permanent.

Eat and drink MORE of these:

- ↑ **Fluids** - Drink lots of water, sports drinks like Gatorade®, (look for lower sugar types), rice drinks (horchata), diluted juice, and broth to replace lost water and electrolytes.
- ↑ **Soluble fiber** helps absorb the extra fluid in your intestines. Think of soft, starchy foods like: white rice (see recipe below), oatmeal, barley, bananas, applesauce, canned or well cooked fruits and vegetables, raw fruits (without the peel), potatoes (skinless), white bread, and refried beans.
- ↑ **The BRATT diet** - Bananas, Rice (white), Applesauce, Toast, and Tea (caffeine-free). This can be eaten all day to stop things up, if needed, but it's not nutritionally complete so you will have to eat some protein and healthy fats after a couple days.

Eat and drink LESS of these:

- ↓ **Insoluble fiber** - Think of roughage: whole wheat, bran, granola, nuts, raw vegetables, salads, cornmeal, corn chips, whole beans, popcorn, and fruits with a skin like apples and pears (OK if peeled).
- ↓ **Dairy** products such as cheese, milk, and butter. Yogurt is usually OK as long as it contains live acidophilus cultures. Lactose free milk or soymilk can be used as a substitute for milk for most people. Try different brands to find a flavor you like.
- ↓ **High fat foods** like pizza, french fries and other fried foods, pastries, peanut butter, nuts, cheese, curries, chocolate, and whole milk products. Talk to your medical provider about fat malabsorption if you are particularly sensitive to fats.
- ↓ **Gas forming foods** like onions, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, garlic, and dried beans.
- ↓ Candy, gums, breath mints and sugar free products that contain sorbitol. Sorbitol is a sweetener that is a known bowel stimulant (laxative).
- ↓ Some **fruit juice** is also high in sorbitol so avoid apple and grape juice (other juice OK).
- ↓ **Citrus** juices and drinks that have caffeine or alcohol can stimulate bowel movements and/or irritate your intestinal lining.
- ↓ **Caffeine** is found in most coffee, chocolate, energy drinks, soft drinks and non-herbal tea.

The Ultimate STOP DIARRHEA Recipe – makes about 4 servings

This is a great recipe to soothe your intestines and ease diarrhea. If your diarrhea is persistent, eat/drink up to 3 times in a day for a couple days at the most; any longer than that any you will need other foods for best nutrition.

1 cup long grain white rice, or Arborio rice (a special short grain rice used to make risotto; makes a creamier congee)

8-10 cups water or a mix of water and vegetable stock

1 teaspoon salt (you may want to omit if making a rice drink)

For rice porridge (congee): Combine ingredients, cover, and simmer for about an hour until it makes a thickened porridge. The longer it cooks the better. It will thicken more as it sets. Season with sweet flavors, like maple syrup, cinnamon, bananas, or fruit spread. Or try it savory, adding small amounts of soy sauce with sautéed mushrooms, green onions (scallions), and/or ginger.

For rice drink (horchata): Add rice to boiling water and simmer until rice is cooked. Blend and add cinnamon, sugar, and lemon rind, to taste.