

# Food Choices to Help Manage Diarrhea caused by Cancer Treatment

Cancer treatments may cause you to have more frequent, loose or watery bowel movements than what is usual for you. Diarrhea is when you have more than 3 loose or watery bowel movements per day.

A low fibre diet may help to manage your diarrhea. A low fibre diet restricts some fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and legumes and can be different from general healthy eating recommendations. As a result, you may feel that it is not very healthy for you. Keep in mind that this diet is temporary to help you manage your diarrhea during your treatment. When your cramps or diarrhea improve, you can slowly return to your regular diet.

## General Advice

- Take anti-diarrhea and other bowel medications as advised by your doctor.
- Choose to eat smaller, more frequent meals.
- Chew your foods well and eat slowly.
- Take a multivitamin and mineral supplement if you think your diet is limited in variety.
- Check with your pharmacist if any of your other medications, including natural health products may be making your diarrhea worse.
- Drink enough liquids to stay hydrated and prevent dehydration.
  - Aim to drink at least 8 to 10 cups of liquids every day
  - You may need to drink more depending on how much diarrhea you are having.
  - Sip liquids throughout the day instead of drinking large amounts at one time.
  - Avoid liquids such as prune juice, sugary drinks, alcoholic drinks or caffeinated drinks as they may worsen diarrhea
  - Follow a low fibre diet (see page 3)

## Signs of dehydration

If you have the following signs of dehydration, let your health care provider know immediately:

- Smaller amounts of dark yellow or amber-colored urine (pee)
- Dizziness when standing or sitting up
- Rapid weight loss
- Increased thirst

Electrolytes like sodium and potassium are lost through diarrhea. You can include foods and liquids that help replace electrolytes.

- Have more sodium-rich foods such as broths, soups, salted crackers, and pretzels. Add extra salt to your cooking.
- Have more potassium-rich foods such as potatoes, bananas, and yogurt.
- Include electrolyte-containing liquids such as coconut water, diluted juices (tomato, apricot, orange), broths, electrolyte replacement drinks (i.e. Gatorade®, Sportade®, Powerade®, Nuun®, Pedialyte®, Gastrolyte®, Hydrolyte®)
- Note: Diet or sugar free versions of sports drinks like Gatorade®, Sportade®, Powerade® may worsen diarrhea

### Recipe for home-made electrolyte replacement

- 4 cups water
- ¼ cup lemon, lime or orange juice
- 2 Tbsp sugar or honey
- ¼ tsp salt

Mix together and place in fridge.  
Sip throughout the day.

Please refer to the *Increasing Fluid Intake* handout.

# Low Fibre Diet

Fibre is found in plant foods. It is the part of plant foods that your body can't digest or absorb. Fibre may also be called roughage or bulk.

It is found in **vegetables, fruits, cereals, whole grain foods, nuts, seeds, beans and legumes.**

## **Meat, seafood, poultry, eggs and tofu products**

You can eat these foods as they are low in fibre and are generally well tolerated.

They include beef, pork, lamb, chicken, turkey, fish, seafood, tofu, eggs and wild game meats.

## **Dairy and dairy alternatives**

Most people tolerate dairy products without issues during treatment. This includes milk, cheese, yogurt, cottage cheese, sour cream, ice cream (no nuts or dried fruit), puddings and cream soups.

Some people who have diarrhea may not be able to digest lactose (the sugar in dairy foods) for short periods during their treatment. If you think this may be happening to you, you may want to try the following tips:

- Choose lactose free milk, or milk alternatives such as soy milk, rice milk, almond milk, hemp milk or coconut beverage.
- Try fermented and aged dairy products (yogurt, kefir, aged cheese).
- Take lactose enzymes (lactaid) before eating dairy products.
- Try small amounts of dairy foods as part of a meal instead of by itself on an empty stomach

# Vegetables

## **Preparation and Eating tips:**

- Choose low fibre vegetables and eat small portions, ½ cup at a time
- Remove seeds, woody stem, stringy fibre and skin
- Well cooked vegetables are often better tolerated. Avoid raw vegetables
- If you are unsure about a vegetable, try a small amount cooked to see if you tolerate it
- Chopping, freezing, and blending does not reduce the fibre content of vegetables
- Some vegetables may cause increased gas. If you notice this, have a very small serving or avoid the food

## **Low fibre vegetables you may have:**

- Asparagus, bamboo shoots, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, cucumber, mushrooms, pepper, potato/sweet potato (without skins), pumpkin, squash, tomato, zucchini.

# Fruits

## **Preparation and Eating tips:**

- Choose mainly low fibre fruits and eat small portions, ½ cup at a time
- Remove all skin, membrane and seeds
- Eat cooked or canned fruit as it is usually tolerated better
- If you are unsure about a fruit, remove all skin and seeds and try a small amount to see if you tolerate it
- Chopping, freezing, blending/pureeing does not reduce the fibre content of fruit
- Dried fruit such as dates, prunes, raisins, figs and dried apricots and berries, such as raspberries, blackberries, and blueberries are high in fibre and may worsen diarrhea.

## **Low fibre fruits you may have:**

- Apple without skin, applesauce, apricots, banana, cantaloupe, grapes, honeydew melon, mandarin orange, mango, nectarine, peach, pear, pineapple, watermelon.

# Cereals, breads, baked goods, crackers and pastas

## Read food labels

Look for “Dietary Fibre” in the the Nutrition Facts label and take note of the serving size. **Choose foods that have no more than 2 grams of fibre per serving.**

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 Slice	
Servings per Container 22	← Servings size
Amount per serving	
Calories 50	Calories from Fat 10
% Daily Value *	
Total Fat 1g	1%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 115mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 10g	3%
Dietary Fiber 5g	20%
Sugars 1g	

## Low fibre grain products you may have:

**Cereals:** Oatmeal, Cream of Wheat®, Cheerios®, Cornflakes®, Rice Krispies®, Special K®

**Breads and baked goods:** Any product made with white flour, spelt flour, white rice flour or 60% whole wheat flour, corn bread and corn tortillas (read labels)

Sourdough, bagels, Kaiser rolls, pita bread, English muffin, and biscuits

**Crackers and biscuits:** Soda crackers, rice crackers, arrowroot cookies, social tea biscuits

**Pasta, noodles and grains:** Pastas made with white flour, egg noodles, rice noodles, white rice, risotto, couscous, orzo, rice cakes (read labels)

## **Nuts and seeds**

Avoid whole nuts and seeds as they are high in fibre and may worsen diarrhea.

Try smooth nut or seed butters in small quantities. **Limit to 1 tablespoon at a time.**

They include: smooth peanut butter, almond butter, tahini, and cashew butter.

## **Legumes (dried beans, lentils, dried peas)**

Avoid these foods as they are high in fibre and may worsen diarrhea, bloating or gas.

Legumes include: chickpeas, hummus, kidney beans, split peas, baked beans.

## Other suggestions:

Avoid these foods **only if** you notice they worsen your diarrhea:

- Spicy foods (strong spices and herbs)
- Beverages with caffeine (for example: coffee, energy drinks, black tea)
- Alcoholic beverages
- Sugarless gum, candy and medicine containing sugar alcohols (sorbitol, mannitol, and xylitol)
- Foods that have a natural laxative effect such as papaya, prunes, prune juice and rhubarb
- Sugary drinks and high sugary foods
- Deep fried, greasy foods
- High fat dairy products, such as cream and ice cream
- High fat processed meats, such as cold cuts, sausages, ham and bacon
- Gravy and rich sauces or salad dressing
- Creamy, high fat desserts/pastries

## When can I resume my normal diet?

Once you have regular bowel movements that are formed and easy to pass, you can resume your normal diet. When you reintroduce foods, do so in small amounts to see if you tolerate them. If you experience diarrhea, cramping, or gas after reintroducing a food, avoid that food and try it again at a later time.

It may be helpful to keep a food and symptom diary to help note any problem foods.

## Should I take a probiotic supplement when I have diarrhea?

There is limited or not enough evidence to support the use of probiotic supplements with the management of diarrhea.



## How to Contact BC Cancer Oncology Nutrition

### Abbotsford

604.851.4733 | Toll free in BC 1.877.547.3777

### Kelowna

250.712.3963 | Toll free in BC 1.888.563.7773

### Prince George

250.645.7330 | Toll free in BC 1.855.775.7300

### Surrey

604.930.4000 | Toll free in BC 1.800.523.2885

### Vancouver

604.877.6000, ext. 672013 | Toll free in BC 1.800.663.3333, ext. 672013

### Victoria

250.519.5525 | Toll free in BC 1.800.670.3322

**BC Cancer website:** [www.bccancer.bc.ca](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca)

### After treatment

If you have general questions about nutrition after you have recovered from your treatments, please call the Oncology Dietitian at HealthLink BC by dialing 8-1-1.

# Low Fibre Meal and Snack Ideas

<b>BREAKFAST</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Boiled, poached or scrambled egg with white toast or corn tortilla</li> <li>-Omelet with cheese and mushroom</li> <li>-Oatmeal or Cream of Wheat®</li> <li>-Cheerios®, Rice Krispies®, Special K®, or Cornflakes® with milk</li> <li>-Plain bagel with cream cheese or smooth peanut butter</li> <li>-Pancakes, French toast or waffles with a side of yogurt and ½ cup of low fibre fruit</li> </ul>
<b>COLD MEALS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Sandwich on white bread with egg salad, tuna, chicken or turkey</li> <li>-Pasta salad</li> <li>-Potato salad</li> <li>-Cold soba noodles with tahini dressing and a side of cucumber</li> </ul>
<b>HOT MEALS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Poached fish, white rice and ½ cup of low fibre vegetable</li> <li>-Soy-marinated tofu, white rice and ½ cup of low fibre vegetable</li> <li>-Pasta with ½ cup of tomato sauce and sautéed zucchini with tofu or meat or chicken</li> <li>-Meat lasagna</li> <li>-Baked chicken breast, mashed potatoes and ½ cup of well-cooked low fibre vegetable</li> <li>-Perogies with sour cream or plain yogurt</li> <li>-Asparagus and cheese quiche</li> <li>-Tuna melt sandwich on spelt or white bread</li> <li>-Stir-fry with chicken and low fibre vegetables served over white rice or noodles</li> </ul>
<b>SNACKS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Smooth nut butter on white bread, crackers or rice cakes with banana or apple slices</li> <li>-Yogurt or cottage cheese with ½ cup of peaches</li> <li>-Applesauce</li> <li>-Cheese and crackers</li> </ul>
<b>SOUPS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Congee (Asian rice porridge) with egg, lean fish, tofu, chicken or ground pork</li> <li>-Chicken noodle soup with a bun or crackers</li> <li>-Miso soup with tofu and white rice noodles</li> <li>-Mushroom soup with crackers</li> <li>-Potato soup</li> </ul>
<b>DESSERTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Dessert tofu with banana slices</li> <li>-Banana bread (no nuts)</li> <li>-Baked custard</li> <li>-Rice or tapioca pudding</li> </ul>