



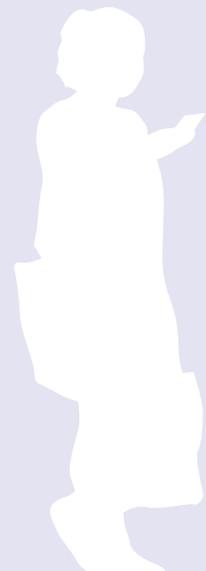
## DIARRHEA and CONSTIPATION

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

You or your loved one has been diagnosed with a type of blood cancer. You may experience side effects from the therapy you receive. Diarrhea and constipation are common side effects. How can you manage them?

This fact sheet will help you:

- Get an overview of diarrhea and constipation
- Learn how to manage these side effects and optimize your health and well-being
- Get a list of questions to ask your healthcare team





The impact of these side effects depends on the type of treatment. They may improve as your treatment changes, and most go away when treatment ends.

Managing side effects is an important part of cancer treatment. Be sure to talk to your healthcare team about any side effects you may have. They can help you manage these as you go through treatment.

## Diarrhea

Both cancer and your treatment can cause diarrhea. This means you have frequent and watery bowel movements.

It's important to manage diarrhea so you don't get dehydrated. Dehydration means your body doesn't have enough water to function well. Being dehydrated can drain your energy and make you feel tired.

### About diarrhea

- It happens when foods and liquids pass through your body too quickly
- It can be severe and can last a long time
- It may mean that your body cannot absorb enough water or nutrients
- It can lead to dehydration
- It may result in poor nutrition
- It can be a sign of infection or sensitivity to certain foods

Talk to your healthcare team to find out the cause so it can be treated.

Talk to your healthcare team to find out if a probiotic supplement will help you. **Probiotics** are good bacteria that help with digestion.

You may be prescribed **medication** if changes to your diet don't help. Check with your healthcare team before taking over-the-counter medication.

## Managing diarrhea

By learning about diarrhea, you will know what to expect and can learn to manage it better.

### Tips to manage what you drink

- Drink clear liquids like water, ginger ale, sports drinks, and clear broth
- Enjoy a frozen treat (ice pop)
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and acidic drinks like orange juice
- Avoid drinks with artificial sweeteners (like xylitol or sorbitol) that are often found in sugar-free products
- Avoid milk and milk products if they make your symptoms worse
- Drink at least 250 mL (1 cup) of liquid after each bowel movement

### Tips to manage what you eat

- Once your symptoms start to improve, eat foods that are easy to digest, such as white rice, puffed rice cereal, low-fibre grains, soft fruits (bananas or applesauce), and well-cooked vegetables without seeds or skins
- Avoid spicy and high-fat foods
- Avoid high-fibre foods like raw fruits, vegetables, and legumes
- Avoid foods with artificial sweeteners that are often found in sugar-free products

### Tips to take care of your skin

It's important to take care of the skin around your anal area so it doesn't become sore and irritated. After a bowel movement:

- Clean the area with warm water or a wet wipe and gently dry it
- Apply a water-repellent ointment, such as one that includes petroleum jelly

### If you experience severe side effects

Call your doctor right away if you have any of these symptoms:

- Loose bowel movements for more than 2 days
- Blood in your stool
- Moderate to severe pain or cramping in your stomach
- A fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher
- No control over your bowel movements

## Constipation

Another common side effect of cancer or your treatment is constipation. This means your bowel movements happen less often than your usual pattern and can be difficult to pass.

### About constipation

- It can lead to small, hard bowel movements
- Symptoms often include cramps, pain, and swelling (bloating) in your stomach
- It can lead to passing gas and irregular bowel movements
- It may result in a loss of appetite and nausea or vomiting
- Older people may be at greater risk
- It can be caused by low fluid intake, pain medication, or another disease



## Managing constipation

By learning about constipation, you will know what to expect and can learn to manage it better.

### Tips to manage constipation

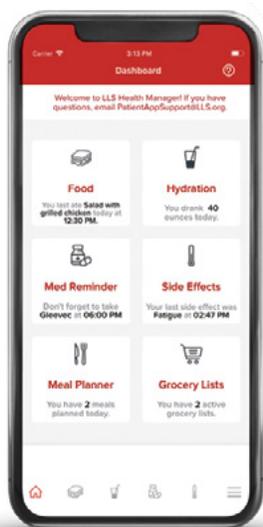
- Be physically active every day
- Increase the fibre in your diet gradually (so you're eating 25 to 35 grams/day) by eating the following foods, depending on your tolerance for them:
  - raw fruits and vegetables
  - beans and legumes
  - whole-grain cereals, whole-grain breads, and oatmeal
- Drink lots of fluids: 2 to 2.4 litres (8 to 10 cups) per day – try warm or hot fluids in the morning
- Try plum or prune juice: start with about 125 mL (1/2 cup)

Talk to your healthcare team or registered dietician about the benefits of taking a fibre supplement. They may also prescribe a stool softener or laxative (medicine or a drug to help empty the bowels).

## Eating well and staying hydrated

When you have diarrhea or constipation, it may be difficult to eat and drink enough. Getting good nutrition and staying hydrated are important for your health, energy, and quality of life.

People with cancer who are malnourished or dehydrated are at a higher risk for health complications, hospitalization, infections, loss of muscle strength, and overall lower quality of life. Their treatment can be delayed, changed, or stopped.



### Track your side effects with the LLS Health Manager App

[bloodcancers.ca/health-manager-app](http://bloodcancers.ca/health-manager-app)

Managing your side effects is an important part of cancer care. Tracking your medication, side effects, and food and nutrition intake allows you to share the information easily with your doctor to identify patterns and strategies.



## Signs of dehydration include:

- Extreme thirst
- Dark-coloured urine (pee)
- Urinating (peeing) less often
- Fatigue
- Dizziness and confusion
- Reduced sweating
- Dry mouth

You will know you are getting enough fluids when you rarely feel thirsty, and your urine is colourless or light yellow.

## Questions to ask your healthcare team

- Is my treatment likely to cause diarrhea and/or constipation?
- What can I do to prevent or manage these side effects?
- What can I eat or drink to help with this issue?
- Are there any medications I can take?
- Can you refer me to a registered dietitian?
- Can you refer me to supportive care for help managing side effects?
- What signs or symptoms require a visit to a healthcare professional or a trip to emergency?



Your healthcare team is there to support you throughout your treatment. If you have side effects, contact them to discuss how to manage your symptoms quickly.

This fact sheet was reviewed by Maryse Carignan, registered nurse, MSc.

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