

## Diarrhea (Page 1 of 2)

### What is diarrhea?

Diarrhea is frequent, loose, or watery bowel movements. This may happen several times a day with or without discomfort, including gas, cramping, and bloating. Diarrhea is a common side effect, occurring in 3 out of 4 people who receive chemotherapy, and can be life-threatening if it leads to dehydration, malnutrition, and electrolyte imbalances. Diarrhea may last for up to 3 weeks after treatment.

### Why does cancer treatment cause diarrhea?

- Chemotherapy works by destroying cancer cells. Unfortunately, when treatment affects the lining of healthy cells in the digestive tract, it can cause diarrhea
- Treatment changes the distribution of body fluids by:
  - Decreasing absorption of fluid in the body
  - Increasing fluid in the bowels

### What effect can diarrhea have on me?

Besides the symptoms listed above, you may experience the following due to low levels of potassium and sodium:

- Palpitations or irregular heartbeat
- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Nausea
- Muscle cramps

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution/Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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*It is important to talk to your doctor or nurse if diarrhea continues for more than 24 hours, or if you have pain and cramping along with diarrhea, so that it can be treated promptly.*

**The information contained herein is not comprehensive and is intended only as a guide.**

