

## Eating Hints to Help with Diarrhea

Diarrhea can be defined as loose or watery stools three or more times per day. This happens when food and liquids pass through your body too quickly. Diarrhea has many causes. These causes can include chemotherapy, radiation, drug reactions, infections, food sensitivity, stress, or injury to the colon. Diarrhea may last a couple of days to several weeks. Contact your doctor if your loose stools are severe, bloody, or lasts for more than a couple of days. This handout will offer tips that may help you manage and improve diarrhea. A low fiber diet may help decrease cramps, gas and diarrhea. A low fiber diet contains less than 13 grams of fiber per day.

### Fiber

#### Grains/Starches

Tips to reduce fiber from the grain products you eat:

- Choose breads, cereals, crackers, pasta, and other grain products made with white flour that do not have any added fiber.
- Choose low fiber cereals such as Corn Flakes<sup>®</sup> and Rice Krispies<sup>®</sup>. Read food labels to find other cereals with less than 1 gram of fiber per serving.
- Limit the high fiber grains and grain products listed below:
  - Bran (6 grams fiber per ½ cup)
  - Buckwheat, cooked (4 grams fiber per ½ cup)
  - Almond flour (6 grams fiber per ½ cup)
  - Whole wheat flour (6 grams fiber per ½ cup)

- Whole wheat pasta (3 grams fiber per ½ cup)
- Whole grain or high fiber breads (3+ grams fiber per slice)
- Brown rice, cooked (3.5 grams fiber per 1 cup)
- Soy flour (9 grams fiber per ½ cup)
- Wild rice, cooked (3 grams fiber per 1 cup)

### Fruit

Tips to lower fiber in the fruits you eat:

- Eat smaller portions.
- Limit high fiber fruits such as unpeeled apple, avocado, blackberries, blueberries, dates, pears, oranges, prunes and raspberries.
- Choose fruits with less than 1.5 grams of fiber per ½ cup serving or per serving size listed below:
  - Applesauce
  - Cantaloupe
  - Fruit juices
  - Honeydew melon
  - Apricots, 4 halves
  - Cherries, fresh or canned
  - Mandarin oranges
  - Olives, 5 green or black
  - Plums, friar or prune
  - Banana, 1/2 medium
  - Fruit cocktail
  - Grapes, green or red
  - Mango
  - Peach, ½ medium
  - Tangerine, 1 medium

## Vegetables

Tips to reduce the fiber from the vegetables you eat:

- Eat smaller portions of vegetables at one time.
- Vegetables may be served raw or cooked. Cooked vegetables may be better tolerated, but cooking does not reduce the fiber in food.
- Limit high fiber vegetables and legumes such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, carrots, green peas, kidney beans, lima beans, pork and beans, potato with skin, pumpkin, lentils, artichokes, collards and rhubarb.
- Although some vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower and onions are low in fiber, you may need to avoid these if you have troubles with gas.
- Choose vegetables with less than 1.5 grams of fiber per ½ cup serving or per serving size listed below:
  - Bean sprouts
  - Cucumber, peeled
  - Green beans
  - Onions
  - Radish
  - Tomatoes, peeled
  - Beets
  - Eggplant, peeled
  - Lettuce, iceberg or leaf
  - Peppers
  - Zucchini or Squash
  - Cauliflower
  - Escarole
  - Mushrooms, fresh
  - Potatoes, ½ cup peeled
  - Sweet potatoes, ¼ cup peeled

## Milk Products

Lactose is a natural sugar found in milk products and can cause or worsen diarrhea for some people. You may be able to handle foods with lactose better once diarrhea has stopped.

Tips to help your body handle foods with lactose:

- Eat or drink smaller amounts of milk products at one time. For example, drink ¼ cup or ½ cup of milk instead of 1 cup with your meal.
- Many people find that they can handle low lactose dairy like yogurts that contain live active cultures and cheeses such as cheddar, mozzarella, swiss, feta, and parmesan.
- Try products such as Lactaid® tablets or lactase drops which may help you better digest lactose.

## Fats

Foods that are high in fat may add to and increase the number of loose stools.

Tips to reduce the amount of fat in the foods you eat:

- Choose lean meats, poultry, and fish that have been baked, broiled, steamed without added fat.
- Choose low fat or fat free milk, yogurt, cheese, and cottage cheese, as tolerated.
- Choose small amounts of low fat or fat free versions of sour cream, cream cheese and mayo.
- Avoid fried foods and foods served with creamy sauces.

## Caffeine

Caffeine may add to and increase the number of loose stools. To reduce caffeine in your diet choose decaffeinated coffee, tea, and soft drinks.

## Spices

Most herbs and spices can be used to add flavor to suit your tastes. You may not be able to handle spicy foods.

## **Fluids**

You may need to replace fluids lost from diarrhea. Try to drink at least 8-10 cups of clear fluids a day. To meet this goal, drink small amounts of fluids, such as 1/2 cup, often throughout the day. Our bodies are in need of extra fluid long before we feel thirsty. Don't wait until you are thirsty to drink fluids. Here are some clear liquids you can include:

- Water
- Fruit juice (except prune)
- Soft drinks that are caffeine free and diluted with water or club soda
- Weak, decaf tea and coffee
- Clear soup and broth
- Popsicles
- Gelatin
- Sports drinks, such as Gatorade®
- Pedialyte®

Some drinks have ingredients called sorbitol and erythritol which may worsen diarrhea in some people. Look for these ingredients in drinks such as fruit drinks, drinks labeled "light" and some sports drinks.

Below is a recipe for a homemade electrolyte replacement mixture for adults with severe diarrhea.

- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 Tablespoon corn syrup
- 1 - 6 ounce can of frozen orange juice
- 6 cups water

Mix all items together. Add enough water to make 1 ½ quarts. Put it in the fridge. Shake well before serving.

## **What should I know about sweet foods?**

Avoid large amounts of very sweet foods, such as cakes and cookies, as the sugar and fat may make diarrhea worse. Avoid sugar-free foods made with the sugar substitutes like sorbitol and xylitol which can cause diarrhea.

## **Can the temperature of the foods I eat affect my stools?**

Drinking fluids at room temperature may help decrease your stools or cramping. Hot or cold liquids may cause bowel movements. You will need to see what temperature works for you.

## **Does the size of the meal I eat matter?**

Yes. Eat small amounts of food and liquid throughout the day instead of three larger meals. Large amounts of food at one time may cause bowel movements.

## **What about fiber supplements?**

Choose water soluble fiber supplements such as Metamucil®. Pectin, such as Sure-Jell®, may also be helpful. These items may help thicken the stool and absorb bile salts in the bowel. Bile salts can irritate the lining of your bowel.

## **How do I replace salt in my diet?**

Eat foods and drink liquids that contain salt such as broth, bouillon, soups, spaghetti sauces, tomato juice, pretzels, and cheese. Do not take salt pills.

## **How do I replace potassium in my diet?**

Choose foods and liquids with potassium such as bananas, baked or boiled potatoes, apricot nectar, orange juice, tomato juice, and meats.

**I have tried a few ideas and am still having diarrhea.**

If you still have loose stools, eat only the foods below for the next 3 days. If bowel movements are still very loose, watery, and frequent contact your doctor.

- Bananas
- White rice
- Cream of rice
- White toast
- Mashed potatoes
- Peeled apples
- Plain bagels
- Eggs
- Yogurt with live cultures
- Caffeine free tea
- Noodles
- Lean meat or poultry without added fat

**Who to Call**

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions, please contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below. You can also visit our website at [www.uwhealth.org/nutrition](http://www.uwhealth.org/nutrition).

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children’s Hospital (AFCH) can be reached at: **(608) 890-5500**.

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF) can be reached at: **(608) 287-2770**.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 9/2020 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Clinical Nutrition Services Department and the Department of Nursing. HF#323