

Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

5. Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea usually means that you need to poo more in a day than you normally do, and the stools you pass are looser than normal.

Diarrhoea is common in people with cancer and may be caused by the cancer itself (e.g. if the patient has bowel cancer) or as a side effect of cancer treatment. Chemotherapy, radiotherapy (e.g. to the pelvis), abdominal surgery and other biological therapies can all cause diarrhoea as well as bone marrow or stem cell transplants.

Many cancer treatments can weaken a person's immune system and make them more likely to pick up infections. Also, side effects of the use of supportive treatments such as antibiotics, laxatives, magnesium-containing medication and anti-sickness drugs are all possible causes of diarrhoea.

How can I manage my diarrhoea?

- If it is a new symptom, it is usually the case that diarrhoea can be treated and well managed.
- Sometimes diarrhoea can be severe. It is important to contact the hospital if this happens. If you have more than 4 to 6 episodes of diarrhoea in a day, contact the hospital on the telephone numbers you have been given and speak to the nurse (or doctor)
- Tell your doctor if you have diarrhoea. They will be able to investigate the cause, and prescribe some anti-diarrhoea medicines.
- Drink plenty of fluids (at least 2litres per day) to replace those lost, but avoid alcohol, coffee or fizzy drinks.
- Avoid spicy or greasy foods.
- Eat small light meals frequently but try to eat slowly.
- Cut down on your intake of fibre, raw fruit and vegetables while you have symptoms of diarrhoea.
- Other causes of diarrhoea could be:
 - medicines – check the leaflet to see if diarrhoea is a side effect
 - a food intolerance or food allergy
 - irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
 - inflammatory bowel disease
 - coeliac disease
 - diverticular disease
- If diarrhoea is a longer-term problem then access to a toilet when out in public will be important. There are *Just Can't Wait* cards available for use at certain public toilets, which might be helpful for those affected by an urgency to pass urine (see Bladder and Bowel Foundation below). Alternatively a public toilet key scheme called "RADAR" allows you access to over 7000 locked public toilets around the country (www.radar.org.uk/people-living-with-health-conditions-disability/the-national-key-scheme/).

Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

5. Diarrhoea - Resources/Information

Local Resources:

Other	GP , local pharmacy, specialist nurse, oncology doctor

National Resources:

<p>Macmillan Toilet Card Available from your CNS or the Seamoor Unit, North Devon District Hospital, Raleigh Park, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 4JB 01271 311579</p>	<p>This card can help if you need to use the toilet urgently when you are out as a result of your cancer treatment. Show this card to staff in shops etc. to allow access to their facilities.</p>
<p>RADAR Key (See also Just Can't Wait Card below) £4.50 Available from www.disabilityrightsuk.org</p>	<p>This unlocks locked Radar Key Region public toilets. There are national regional lists showing where the toilets are. This can be purchased for £3.50 .</p>
<p>The Bowel and Bladder Community 7, The Court, Holywell Business Park, Northfield Road, Southam, CV47 0FS General Enquiries: 01926 357220 Email: help@bladderandbowel.community.org www.bladderandbowel.org https://www.bladderandbowel.org/help-information/just-cant-wait-card-app/</p>	<p>Until recently known as B&B Foundation this charity's website is packed with practical information and advice, including travel and travel insurance. The Just Can't Wait Card is now completely free of charge when ordered online. Fill out a few details and they will post your high quality, durable Just Can't Wait card to your home. Never worry about locating your 'Just Can't Wait' toilet card in a hurry as you can now download a version of this card straight to your iPhone. It also locates nearest toilets. See link opposite</p>
<p>Age UK https://www.ageuk.org.uk/</p>	<p>https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/conditions-illnesses/incontinence/</p>
<p>NHS Choices Living with incontinence</p>	<p>https://www.nhs.uk/news/2007/August/Pages/NHSChoices.aspx</p>
<p>Macmillan Cancer Support Line www.macmillan.org.uk Call 0808 808 00 00 — 7 days a week 8am—8pm</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. Please note that calls to this number are not free when made from outside the UK. If you are calling from outside of the UK call on +44 207 091 2230</p>
<p>Macmillan on-line Community</p>	<p>Online support— to share experiences or vent your emotions find others who understand—join today!</p>
<p>Marie Curie Support Line — Living with a terminal illness and looking for support www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. The Support Line is open 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday and 11am – 5pm Saturday</p>

Other Resources :

Macmillan Booklets:	Controlling cancer pain—MAC11670
	Managing the symptoms of cancer—MAC11671