

Managing chemotherapy-induced diarrhoea

Chemotherapy can cause problems with frequent and loose bowel motions (diarrhoea) and this can be serious. If you have diarrhoea, you can become dehydrated very quickly, especially if you have nausea (feeling sick) or vomiting or aren't drinking enough.

Diarrhoea becomes a problem when your motions, or poos are like

water or loose porridge, and you pass them more than four to six times a day. This can cause major health problems because you lose important salts, minerals and protein in the diarrhoea, not just water.

The following information explains what you should do if you have diarrhoea while you're on chemotherapy as well as tips for avoiding dehydration, recognising the signs of dehydration and knowing what to do if you get dehydrated.

Taking medicine to control your diarrhoea

Loperamide (Diamide, Nodia or Imodium)

- If you've been prescribed loperamide, you'll usually be advised to take a tablet after each loose or extra poo. The medicine may take about half an hour to work after you've taken it – how long it lasts will vary from person to person.
- You can have up to eight loperamide tablets a day as long as you don't take more than two tablets at a time. If you need more than this, phone the Oncology Department where you had your treatment.
- The most likely side effect of loperamide is that it may cause constipation or bloating.

Signs you're becoming dehydrated

If you're becoming dehydrated, you'll have one or more of these symptoms:

- a lot of diarrhoea (going to the toilet to poo more than four to six times a day)
- a lot of watery output from your stoma (or emptying your bag more than four to five times a day)
- feeling sick (nausea) or vomiting
- headaches
- feeling faint
- difficulty concentrating
- urinating (peeing) less, and your urine being dark.





How to stop yourself becoming dehydrated

There are a few easy things you can do to stop yourself becoming dehydrated:

- drink a lot of water
- avoid drinks that have caffeine in them, like tea, coffee, cola and many energy drinks
- avoid alcohol
- if you have an ileostomy, continue adding two teaspoons of salt a day to your diet.

What to do if you become dehydrated

- Drink more fluids (you can use oral rehydration solutions such as Gastrolyte or Enerlyte).
- If you've been prescribed medicine for nausea or vomiting, take it following the instructions your doctor has given you.
- If you've been prescribed loperamide, take it following the instructions your doctor has given you.

What to do if you don't get better

If you feel worse, or symptoms last for more than 24 hours, seek urgent advice from the Oncology Department where you had your treatment.

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