

## **Managing Diarrhea**

The following information is based on the general experiences of many prostate cancer patients.

Your experience may be different. If you have any questions about what prostate cancer treatment services are covered by your health insurance, please contact your health care provider or health insurance provider.

This education material was made possible by a Grant from the California Department of Justice, Antitrust Law Section, from litigation settlement funds to benefit Californians diagnosed with cancer or their families.

**Please feel free to read only those parts of the booklet you need now. You don't need to read everything right now. You can always read more later.**

## **Table of Contents**

What Will I Learn By Reading This Booklet? .....	4
What Is Diarrhea? .....	5
Why Does Chemotherapy Cause Diarrhea? .....	6
What Can I Do To Manage My Diarrhea? .....	8
When Should I Call My Doctor? .....	11
What Have I Learned By Reading This Booklet? .....	12
Key Words .....	13

## What Will I Learn By Reading This Booklet?

When you have **chemotherapy** (key-mo-ther-a-pee) to control your prostate cancer, you may have **side effects** or unwanted changes in your body. Side effects are different from person to person, and may be different from one treatment to the next. Some people have no or very mild side effects. The good news is that there are ways to deal with most of the side effects. In this booklet you will learn:

- What **diarrhea** (dye-a-re-a) is
- Why does chemotherapy cause diarrhea
- Things you can do to manage your diarrhea
- When to call your doctor

It is important for you to learn how to manage the side effects you may have from chemotherapy so that you can keep doing as many of your normal activities as possible.

Words that appear in **bold** (dark text) can be found in the “Key Words” section at the end of this booklet.

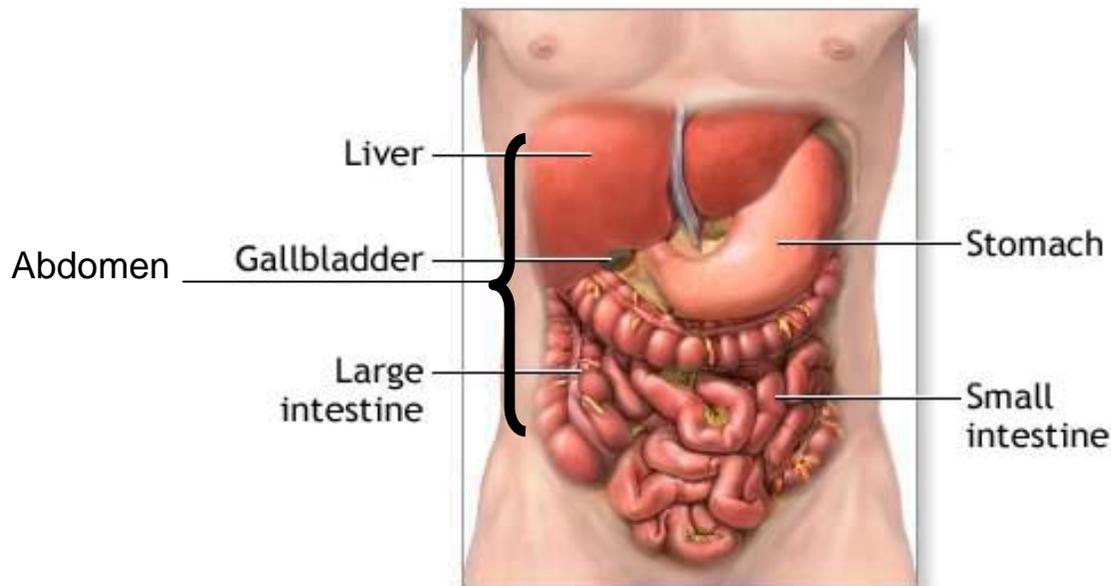
## **What Is Diarrhea?**

**Diarrhea** is when you have loose and runny bowel movements three or more times in one day. This is a common side effect or unwanted change in your body from some chemotherapy medicines.

## Why Does Chemotherapy Cause Diarrhea?

The powerful **anticancer** medicines you take can affect the healthy cells in your body, including the cells that line the inside of your intestines. Your intestines help your body to take in food, water, and other liquids. If your chemotherapy medicines affect the cells that line the inside of your intestines, they cannot take food and water into your body very well. The food and water stay in your intestines. This causes diarrhea.

Your Body's Digestive System



Diarrhea usually happens in the first few days after your chemotherapy treatment.

It may also happen one or two weeks after you get your chemotherapy treatment.

If you have diarrhea, you should tell your doctor and health care team right away.

If your diarrhea is untreated, you may become **dehydrated** (when your body loses too much fluid). There are medicines that your doctor or health care team can give to you that will make your diarrhea better.

## What Can I Do To Manage My Diarrhea?

Just as every cancer patient's treatment is different, the way each person responds to his treatment is also different. While one person may get diarrhea, another may not. However, there are things you can do to help deal with this treatment side effect.

- Do not take any **over-the-counter** medicines (medicines you buy without a prescription from your doctor) for your diarrhea without talking to your doctor or health care team.
- Drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day. It is important to put back the fluids you lose.



- Drink beverages and eat foods that are "clear," such as apple juice and ginger ale, soup broth, popsicles, and Jell-O®. These are usually gentler on your stomach and easier to digest.
- Eat foods that are gentle on your bowels like ripe bananas, grated apples, applesauce, boiled white rice, smooth peanut butter, skinless chicken or turkey, creamed cereals, tapioca, fish, washed, peeled fruit like apples, peaches, nectarines, mashed or baked potatoes without the

skin, cooked vegetables, angel food cake, graham crackers, and vanilla wafers.

- Stay away from raw vegetables and vegetables that are hard to digest, such as broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and corn.
- Stay away from spicy foods, such as chili.
- Stay away from high-fiber foods, such as whole grain products (cereals, breads) and foods containing bran (bran muffins). These foods tend to speed up your digestion (when your body breaks down the food you eat so your body can use it) and can make your diarrhea worse.
- Eat small meals throughout the day instead of three large meals.
- Keep your **anal** (the area around your **anus** which is the opening through which stool passes out of your body) area clean and moist to prevent skin irritation. After each bowel movement, wash your anal area with warm water and gently pat dry.
- Write down how many runny bowel movements you have in a day and report this to your doctor.
- Tell your doctor about any hard or bloody bowel movements you may have.

- Speak to your doctor and health care team about medicines you can take to help you.

### **Plan For Managing Your Diarrhea**

- What foods and drinks will help relieve your diarrhea?

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- What foods should you stay away from if you have diarrhea?

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- How do you get in touch with your doctor or health care team if you need help?

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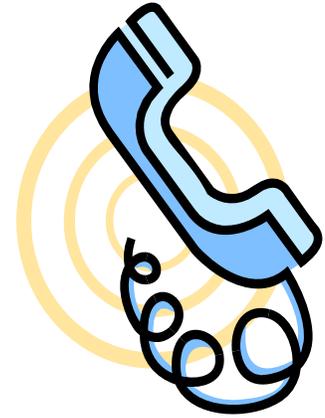
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## When Should I Call My Doctor?

You should call your doctor if you have:

- A fever higher than 100° F or 38° C
- Really bad pain or cramps in your **abdomen** (the part of your body above and around your belly button),
- Urine (pee) that is very dark. Urine (pee) is usually a pale yellow color.
- Black stools that look like tar or blood in your stool.
- If the changes you make to what you eat or drink does not help.
- The medicines your doctor gives you for your diarrhea do not help.



If you have any of these signs talk to your doctor or health care team. There are medicines and treatments that can help you feel better. It is important that you talk to your doctor or health care team about any side effects you may have during or after your treatment. Your health care team can help treat these problems.

<b>Doctor's Name</b>	
<b>Doctor's office phone number</b>	
<b>Doctor's pager</b>	

## **What Have I Learned By Reading This Booklet?**

In this booklet, you learned about:

- What diarrhea is
- Why chemotherapy can cause diarrhea
- How to treat your diarrhea
- Things you can do to help manage your diarrhea
- When to call your doctor

If you have any questions, please talk to your doctor or health care team. It is important that you understand what is going on with your prostate cancer treatment. This knowledge will help you take better care of yourself and feel more in control so that you can get the most from your treatment.

## Key Words

**Abdomen:** the part of your body above and around your belly button.

**Anal:** the area around your anus.

**Anus:** the opening through which stool passes out of your body. The act of passing stools is called a 'bowel movement' or 'opening your bowels'.

**Anticancer:** medicines used in the treatment of cancer.

**Chemotherapy (key-mo-ther-a-pee):** a prostate cancer treatment, which treats your whole body with powerful anticancer medicines to kill many of your prostate cancer cells.

**Diarrhea** (dye-a-re-a): loose and runny bowel movements that happen more three or more times in one day.

**Dehydrated:** when your body loses too much fluid.

**Digestion:** when your body breaks down the food you eat so your body can use it.

**Digestive system:** the system in your body made up of your mouth, throat, stomach, and intestines that uses the food you eat to give your body energy.

**Over-the-counter:** medicines you buy without a prescription from your doctor.

**Side Effects:** unwanted changes in your body caused by your prostate cancer treatment.

**Urine:** pee.