

## Diarrhea and Dialysis

Diarrhea is when water and food are poorly absorbed. Watery stools occur often, and can be uncomfortable, cause weakness and dehydration and stop you from doing your daily activities.

Make sure your doctors and nurses know you are having diarrhea, so they can help. Also, check with your nutritionist to prevent dehydration and keep labs in a safe range.



There are many possible causes of diarrhea in a dialysis patient. Check the boxes that fit you:

**Food allergies / Food poisoning**

Allergies to milk foods can cause diarrhea. Bacteria from spoiled food (like E. Coli or Salmonella) can also lead to diarrhea.

**Antibiotics/Medications**

When antibiotics are given, they can wipe out the "good" bacteria in your intestine, which can cause diarrhea. Some medicines have diarrhea as a side effect, or may cause diarrhea from mixing with other medicines.

**Surgery**

Gastrectomy, Short Bowel Resections and other stomach or intestinal surgeries often have diarrhea as a short-term and sometimes long-term side effect.

**Alcohol**

Alcohol can often cause diarrhea due to poor vitamin and mineral absorption, and can cause faster movement of food through the intestine.

**Low Parathyroid Levels**

Vitamin D use or removing the parathyroid glands can give very low PTH levels in some renal patients, causing diarrhea.

**Nutritional Supplements**

Supplements like Ensure Plus, Boost Plus, Nepro and others are high in calories, vitamins and minerals to give extra nutrition, without increasing fluids. This can pull fluid from the intestines, causing diarrhea.

**Diabetes**

Diabetes can cause slow movement of food through the intestine. This can cause bacteria to grow, causing diarrhea. Also, sugar-free foods and medicines often contain Sorbitol, which can cause diarrhea.

**Spicy Foods**

Patients on a low salt diet use spices to make food less bland. Things in foods like Capsicum (the spicy part of Jalapeno peppers) or other spices can cause diarrhea.

**Increased Calcium Levels**

Occasionally high calcium levels can lead to poor fat absorption, which may cause diarrhea.

**Chronic diseases**

Crohn's disease, Gallbladder disease, Celiac disease, and Ulcerative colitis are all diseases with problems absorbing nutrients in the stomach and intestines, leading to diarrhea.

**There are other factors that may cause diarrhea not listed here. Ask your doctor if you cannot narrow down the reason for your diarrhea.**

So — What can you do when Diarrhea Strikes?

- 1) **Clear Liquid Diet:** The first thing to do is take in very little that may bother your intestines. Clear liquids are good to start with. They are anything that you can see through: Jell-O, clear juice, broth, Popsicles or Resource Fruit Beverage Supplement. This diet will not give enough calories and you should not follow it for more than two days.
- 2) **Weigh yourself:** Be sure to weigh yourself daily during bouts of diarrhea. Weight gain above 6 pounds (3kg) should be avoided, but weight loss may show dehydration. Try to replace your fluid losses from diarrhea with fluid. If you are unable to weigh yourself, then try to estimate fluid losses from diarrhea and replace each loss with fluids.
- 3) **Things to Avoid:** Avoid milk if you are allergic, or if you are currently having diarrhea. Milk is harder to digest than clear liquids. Don't drink coffee, tee, pop with caffeine or alcohol until the diarrhea stops. These may cause the diarrhea to get worse.
- 4) **Bland or Soft Diet:** Stick with bland foods like crackers, white toast, eggs, chicken, or cream of wheat when you move on from the clear liquid diet. Stay away from high fiber foods like vegetables, fruits and whole grains, to allow the intestines to rest. Avoid fatty, spicy, or heavily seasoned foods, as these may bother your intestines.
- 5) **Diabetics:** If you are diabetic, you need to try to stabilize your blood sugars and meet your calorie needs. Your insulin doses may need to be changed due to less food intake. Eat fewer sugar-free items that may have Sorbitol or other sweeteners in them that cause diarrhea.
- 6) **Medications:** Check medications with your doctor to see if any new medications or mixtures of two or more medications are causing the diarrhea.
- 7) **Long Term Diarrhea:** If the diarrhea goes on more than three days, then adding fiber to "soak up the water" and provide bulk to the stool may be good. Fiber is found in fruits, vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals, bran, nuts and beans. Many of these foods are high in potassium and/or phosphorous, so make good choices.