

## 5. Diarrhoea

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. In any event, since diarrhoea is potentially serious it should always be carefully managed by the clinical team treating you so **ensure that you inform the medical team if you develop diarrhoea that continues for more than 2 days.**
- 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 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.
- 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/](http://www.radar.org.uk/people-living-with-health-conditions-disability/the-national-key-scheme/)).

**If diarrhoea is caused by radiotherapy treatment then dietary changes are unlikely to help. Therefore be sure to follow advice from your doctor and radiographer.**

## Local Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<b>Plymouth Community Healthcare</b> Provides a continence nursing service locally to reduce the incidence of bladder and bowel dysfunction. Provides comprehensive and effective assessment, treatment advice and review. Please note that patients who require provision of incontinence pads should be referred to their own District Nurse via their GP surgery	<b>Plymouth Community Healthcare</b> 01752 434759 Open referral service
<b>Macmillan Toilet Card</b> 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	<b>Mustard Tree, Derriford Hospital:</b> Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm 01752 430060/01752 431468 <b>Kingsbridge:</b> Tuesdays 10am to 4pm 01548 852349 <b>Liskeard:</b> Thursdays 10am to 4pm 01579 373500 <b>Tavistock:</b> Fridays 10am to 4pm 01822 615935
<b>RADAR Key</b> This will enable you to use locked public toilets.	A key is available at £4.50 from Disability Rights UK Tel: 0207 250 8191 Website: <a href="http://disabilityrightsuk.org">disabilityrightsuk.org</a>
<b>Mustard Tree Cancer Support &amp; Triangle Drop In Centres</b> Ask questions, share concerns, offers a range of services including benefits advice. Support, advice and information for cancer patients and their carers	<b>Mustard Tree, Derriford Hospital:</b> Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm 01752 430060/01752 431468 <b>Kingsbridge:</b> Tuesdays 10am to 4pm 01548 852349 <b>Liskeard:</b> Thursdays 10am to 4pm 01579 373500 <b>Tavistock:</b> Fridays 10am to 4pm 01822 615935
<b>Other Resources</b>	Your GP, Oncology Doctor, Specialist nurse or District Nurse.

## National Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<b>The Bladder and Bowel Foundation</b> Provides information on how to manage bladder and bowel problems.	<a href="http://www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org">www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org</a> Helpline: <b>0845 345 0165</b> General Enquiries: <b>01536 533 255</b>
<b>Age UK</b>	<a href="http://www.ageuk.org.uk">www.ageuk.org.uk</a>
<b>NHS Choices – living with incontinence</b>	<a href="http://www.nhs.uk">www.nhs.uk</a>
<b>Macmillan Cancer Support</b> Provide comprehensive advice and information on all aspects of cancer.	<a href="http://www.macmillan.org.uk">www.macmillan.org.uk</a> <b>0808 808 0000</b> (Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm)

## Further information:

<b>Macmillan Cancer Support booklets:</b> – Available free from the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre
Cancer and complementary therapies
Pelvic radiotherapy
Controlling cancer pain
Controlling the symptoms of cancer
Understanding chemotherapy
Understanding radiotherapy
<b>Macmillan Cancer Support Online Community:</b>
If you have diarrhoea – further useful specific information regarding causes/managing diarrhoea