
HNA Prompt Sheet: Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea describes unformed loose or watery bowel motions usually associated with a more frequent bowel habit. Causes include the cancer itself, changes in bowel function due to cancer treatments, infection, and side effects of drugs.

Three particular cancer related risk factors for diarrhoea are:

1. Chemotherapy (common causative drugs include capecitabine, 5FU, irinotecan and TK inhibitors). There are specific recommendations in this situation, such as the use of loperamide (Imodium). It must be managed acutely to prevent dehydration and avoid more serious side effects.
2. Gastrointestinal surgery particularly colonic resection +/- ileostomy formation.
3. Pelvic radiotherapy, which can cause irritation and inflammation of the lining of the bowel. The effect of radiotherapy may be seen during or soon after treatment, or many years later.

Acute diarrhoea should be assessed including a diarrhoea grading scale such as the Bristol stool chart and frequency of bowel movements.

Chronic diarrhoea needs careful assessment to exclude conditions such as small intestinal bacteria overgrowth (SIBO), bile acid malabsorption (BAM), pancreatic insufficiency or other malabsorption problems.

Have you considered?

- Sending a stool specimen to exclude infective causes – viral, e.g. norovirus; bacterial, e.g. C.difficile, E.coli; or parasitic.
- Assessing if any of the following are contributory: diet, e.g. high levels of fibre, fatty/spicy foods, dietary intolerances, chewing gum, fizzy/alcoholic or stimulant drinks such as caffeine; herbal medicines, e.g. milk thistle, ginseng.
- Whether other medical conditions such as Crohn's disease, colitis, coeliac disease
- Emotional factors, such as anxiety and depression, are contributing.
- Whether current medication, e.g. antibiotics, laxatives, beta blockers, omeprazole, lansoprazole, ranitidine and metformin/metoclopramide, are contributing.
- Prescribing small but regular doses of liquid loperamide (0.5-1mg ½ hour before meals and bed time)
- Stool bulking agents
- Advising on perianal skin care, including use of non-alcoholic creams, careful wiping, cotton underwear, loose clothing, and barrier creams.
- Trying foods that help: jelly sweets, marshmallows, toast, white rice/bread/pasta, bananas
- Advising drinking rehydrating fluids such as water, herbal teas, clear soups, non-fizzy drinks
- Advising using electrolyte drinks such as Dioralyte or e-mix if diarrhoea is severe
- Giving advice on preparation before leaving the home, e.g. taking spare clothes, pads and toilet cards.

Services which may help

- Continence services
- GP/district nursing
- Women's/men's health physiotherapy

Patient information

Macmillan Cancer Support:

<http://be.macmillan.org.uk/Downloads/CancerInformation/LivingWithAndAfterCancer/MAC13613EatingproblemsE03lowrespdf20170921LK.pdf>

Bladder and Bowel Foundation: www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

British Nutrition Foundation: <https://www.nutrition.org.uk/>

Bowel Cancer UK: www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk/yourdiet

Radar Keys: <https://actionondisability.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/RADAR-Key-Flyer-DF.pdf>

Want to know more?

Pawlyn C, Khan M, Muls A, Srishkandarajah P, Kaiser M, Davies F, Morgan G, Andreyev HJN. Lenalidomide-induced diarrhea in patients with myeloma is caused by bile acid malabsorption that responds to treatment. *Blood* 2014; 124: 2467-2468.

Andreyev J, Ross P, Donnellan C, Lennan E et al. (2014). Guidance on the management of diarrhoea during cancer chemotherapy. *The Lancet Oncology* 15(10): e447–e460

The Practical Management of the Gastrointestinal Symptoms of Pelvic Radiation Disease: http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Documents/AboutUs/Health_professionals/P215TRMGIBooklet_AW.pdf