

# DIGESTIVE TROUBLES

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## ■ Important information for you

Your treatment may possibly upset your digestion, provoking diarrhea or constipation. Diarrhea is marked by liquid stools or more frequent bowel movements (two to four times as often as usual). It may give rise to problems of dehydration or local irritation and be accompanied by stomach cramps.

Constipation reduces the frequency of bowel movements and makes the stools so hard that it is difficult to expel them. It is often accentuated by medication for nausea or pain. The doctor can prescribe you a treatment to keep the bowels open even while you are taking medicine for pain or nausea. Reduced physical activity during your illness, as well as certain forms of chemotherapy, also tend to slow down your digestion.

### **Be quick to tell the doctor about:**

- ▶ Diarrhea that lasts more than 48 hours
- ▶ Constipation continuing for more than three days
- ▶ Blood in your stool
- ▶ Stomach pains, bloating or abdominal cramps
- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Nausea or vomiting
- ▶ Loss of appetite

### **An additional way of dealing with the problem**

Only psyllium (plant therapy) is proven to improve intestinal transit. It exists in the form of granules that can be added to yoghurt or fruit juice for example. Psyllium swells and increases the volume of the stools by absorbing water, so it is essential to drink plenty when regulating digestion with this type of plant.

## Some advice

### If you have diarrhea

- ▶ Drink at least 1.5 litres a day in small quantities, frequently and preferably at room temperature (water, herb teas). Do not take more than three caffeine- or theine-containing drinks per day.
- ▶ Clean your anus frequently to prevent local irritation. Take, for example, a tepid or cool shower and pat the skin dry. Consult your care team about using any protective creams.
- ▶ Choose a low-fat diet, favouring foods such as cooked carrots, potatoes, rice, pasta or bananas. They contain little fibre or fibre of the 'soluble' kind. Whole-wheat bread and other fibre-rich foods are not advised.
- ▶ Avoid also 'light' or 'low-sugar' products or those containing sweeteners (sorbitol).

### If you are constipated

- ▶ Drink little and often.
- ▶ Increase your daily consumption of liquid by at least half a litre.
- ▶ Keep up regular stimulating physical exercise like walking.



This card was translated by



## **N. B.**

Ligue Suisse contre le cancer brochure, *Difficultés alimentaires en cas de cancer* [Food problems in cancer cases].