

Reducing Bowel Gas during Pelvic Radiotherapy

Nutrition and Dietetics

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Information for Patients

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It is normal to produce gas as part of digestion; however the amount of gas produced can change frequently or increase during radiotherapy. This can become uncomfortable so this diet sheet has been given to you to help reduce/ manage bowel gas. The information in this leaflet will help you to avoid or limit high gas producing foods and provides practical tips to help with this.

This diet sheet will be given to you prior to starting radiotherapy as the amount of bowel gas could affect your radiotherapy planning and treatment.

Whilst this diet sheet highlights foods which you may need to limit for symptoms, you should follow your normal diet where possible.

Foods which can cause increased gas production

Some foods produce more gas than others and you may wish to reduce the quantity of some of these rather than stopping them entirely. These include:

- Chewing gum
- Fizzy (carbonated) drinks
- Nuts and seeds
- Beans and pulses – *consider different carbohydrates such as white pasta, white bread or rice*
- Dried fruit – *consider fresh fruit*
- Certain vegetables including cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, garlic, onions, mushrooms, peas, and sweetcorn – *consider e.g. carrots, courgettes, squash, celeriac, aubergine*

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- Skins and seeds in fruit and vegetables
- Sugar free products with artificial sweeteners e.g. sugar free sweets and sweeteners
- Caffeine – try to limit to 1-2 cups a day.
- Wholegrain products and cereals i.e. Wholemeal pasta, bread, naan, pitta, seeded bread Weetabix, All Bran, Muesli – *consider e.g. white pasta, white bread, cornflakes*

Practical tips to reduce gas production

Sometimes lifestyle changes can help so these tips below may help with your symptoms.

- Eat regularly throughout the day – avoid skipping meals.
- Regular activity can improve bowel movements.
- Eat slowly and chew well to avoid swallowing air at mealtimes.
- Avoid foods you know make you feel bloated (beyond those listed on the previous page).
- Some herbs and spices are thought to help digestion such as ginger and peppermint.
- Drink plenty of fluid throughout the day – a minimum of 8-10 cups or 2L daily is recommended.

Drink plenty of fluids

You may need to increase your fluid intake to help support your bowel movements. You should aim for 2 litres of water / squash or hot drinks, whilst avoiding excess caffeinated drinks as these can increase the frequency of urinating. These include tea, green tea, coffee, fizzy drinks and energy drinks. Try to drink decaffeinated/reduced caffeine drinks, herbal teas or squash / juice. There is some research to suggest peppermint tea can help improve symptoms of wind.

Try to avoid drinking fizzy / carbonated drinks including alcohol to help minimise bloating. To reduce the fizz, drinks can be poured and left to stand for 10 minutes. Still soft drinks are also suitable.

Exercise

Regular gentle exercise such as walking and stretching can help move wind and regulate your bowel movements. If you feel you have wind before your radiotherapy try walking around to see if this helps you to release the wind.

You may feel tired during your radiotherapy treatment so it is important to rest as your body needs it and to exercise gently if you think you can manage it.

Still having symptoms?

Symptoms caused by your radiotherapy can last weeks or months after your last session and therefore you may continue to need support with your diet after you have finished. If these tips are not supporting you with your symptoms, a separate diet sheet to modify the fibre content of your diet may be available to support your symptoms. Please contact your medical team for further advice as a referral to a dietitian may be needed whilst you make those changes.

Weight management

Some symptoms of radiotherapy and / or chemotherapy can include diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting, taste changes and a low appetite. This may cause weight loss and therefore you may need some more specific dietary support to help with your treatment.

Some symptoms of hormone treatment can include weight gain but it is important to ensure your weight is stable during your cancer treatment.

Please monitor your weight during treatment and if you have any concerns then you may benefit from a referral to a Dietitian. Please talk to your Nurse, Radiographer or Consultant if you would like further support.

Oral Nutritional Supplements

If you have lost weight and/or have a poor appetite you may require high energy and protein supplement drinks. These supplements can help to ensure you are getting enough calories, protein, vitamin and minerals which will help your energy levels and quality of life. They are available through your GP, hospital Consultant or Dietitian.

If you have any concerns regarding this diet sheet, have any further questions or would like a referral to a Dietitian, please speak to your medical team.

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