

Guide to Managing Chronic Diarrhea

Diarrhea that has been occurring over a prolonged period of time can be due to a single disorder, or a combination of factors/disorders. Some of the categories that are usually considered, and may be included as part of your evaluation, include:

- Infectious cause
- Maldigestive disorder, inflammatory bowel disease, food allergy, partial blockage of the intestinal tract, or irritable bowel syndrome
- Consider the elimination of medications, vitamins, herbal supplements, and/or laxative use.

Diet is an integral part of improving symptoms associated with diarrhea, and in some cases may result in resolution of diarrhea. One of the most common food products that can result in diarrhea, or worsen the condition is **dairy products**. Patients can be lactose intolerant and/or have an allergy to cow's milk protein. Milk is contained in many food products we consume daily, including bread, pasta sauces, and baked goods. Dr. Crenshaw may provide you with a milk free diet, which you should institute and maintain for a minimum of three weeks.

Other foods that can result in worsening diarrhea include high fat containing foods, tomato-based products, red meat, raw vegetables, high fiber foods, lettuce, fruit with skins, fruit juices such as apple juice, caffeine-containing products, carbonated beverages, and alcohol. If you consume a large and/or frequent amount of any combination of these food products, this may be contributing to your diarrhea.

Typically, Dr. Crenshaw recommends an **elimination diet** as part of the management of your chronic diarrhea. This requires an organized approach to changing your diet. You should eliminate one food product at a time, and do so for a minimum of 3 weeks. If your symptoms do not improve, reintroduce the eliminated food product, and take out a different food product from your diet. Please note that the best beverage on a regular basis is water.

Other helpful hints include

- Do not chew gum, suck on candy, smoke, chew tobacco or substitute any other oral habits, as this will result in significant air swallowing and may contribute to cramping occasionally associated with diarrhea.
- Review any medications, supplements, or vitamins you may have started prior to developing diarrhea. Herbal supplements and teas can contain laxatives, lactose, or non-absorbable sugars. Lactose is commonly used in the pharmaceutical industry as part of formulations for vitamins and medication and may be contributing to your diarrhea if you are lactose intolerant.
- Stress may be a contributing factor, and making changes to better manage stress will result in symptomatic improvement. This includes getting enough sleep each night.