

# Diarrhoea

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**This Infosheet explains what diarrhoea is, what causes it in AL amyloidosis patients, what its symptoms are, how it is treated and some tips for self-management.**

## What is diarrhoea?

Diarrhoea is the passing of loose or watery stools more than three times a day.

Sometimes diarrhoea can be acute (lasting only for a short time) but for some it can be chronic (persisting for long periods).

If you do have diarrhoea it is important to deal with it straight

away. Any change in your regular bowel pattern which lasts longer than a few days should be reported to your doctor or nurse.

Though you may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed talking about your bowels, try to remember that your doctor and nurse are there to help prevent and manage these problems, and will be used to talking about them.

## What are the signs and symptoms of diarrhoea?

- More than three loose or watery bowel movements per day
- Cramping stomach pains
- An urgent need to go to the toilet
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fever
- Headache
- Loss of appetite

## What are the causes of diarrhoea in AL amyloidosis?

It is important to know what has caused your diarrhoea, as this will help both you and your doctor or nurse treat it effectively and prevent it from recurring.

The causes of diarrhoea in AL amyloidosis include:

### **AL amyloidosis**

AL amyloidosis itself may cause diarrhoea, especially if you have a condition called autonomic neuropathy (damage to the nerves that control the functions of internal organs).

### **Side-effects of treatment**

Some of the treatments used in AL amyloidosis can cause

diarrhoea by affecting how the bowel moves.

Treatments that may cause diarrhoea include:

- Chemotherapy drugs, such as melphalan or cyclophosphamide
- Velcade® (bortezomib), Revlimid® (lenalidomide)
- Antibiotics

### **Stress, anxiety and depression**

Emotional disturbances such as periods of stress or anxiety may cause diarrhoea.

### **Infection**

Certain bacterial and viral infections cause diarrhoea. It is important to tell your doctor if you suspect your diarrhoea is caused by an infection, for example if you have been around others that have had stomach bugs.

### **Constipation and laxatives**

Excessively watery or runny diarrhoea may occur as a result of constipation, if your bowel is blocked with hard stools. Laxatives used to treat constipation may also cause diarrhoea.

## How is diarrhoea treated?

If your diarrhoea is caused by your AL amyloidosis, treatment to stop the production of the abnormal amyloid protein may help. If the production of amyloid can be stopped, amyloid deposits may be broken down and this may improve bowel function. If your diarrhoea is a side-effect of AL amyloidosis treatment, your doctor may adjust your treatment schedule and/or reduce the dose or temporarily stop treatment until it improves.

If your diarrhoea is caused by an infection, it is not advisable to use over-the-counter remedies as these may ease symptoms without dealing with the underlying infection.

Before prescribing any treatment for your diarrhoea, your doctor will want to find out some more information which will help in assessing what treatment is right for you.

## Medical treatments

If your doctor decides that you need treatment for your diarrhoea then you may be prescribed one of the drugs listed on the table on page 4.

## Some tips for self-management/prevention

- Keep hydrated by drinking water or diluted juice, avoid alcohol and caffeine
- Use rehydration fluids if prescribed by your doctor
- Try to keep eating. Eat small, frequent meals made from light foods – white fish, poultry, eggs (well-cooked), white bread, pasta or rice. Avoid highly spiced or fatty foods and eat your meals slowly
- Always be honest with your doctor or nurse about the impact that diarrhoea is having on your life and report it as early as possible – they are there to help you
- Acidophilus or other bacteria found in live yoghurt or live-yoghurt drinks can help to ease diarrhoea caused by antibiotics. Antibiotics can kill off the healthy bacteria normally found in the bowel, but the bacteria found in live yoghurt may replace them. However, you should avoid live yoghurt if your white cell count is low. If in doubt about whether this affects you, check with your doctor or nurse

## Treatments for diarrhoea

Type	Examples	How they work	Side-effects
<b>Antimotility drugs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Loperamide* (see note below)</li> <li>■ Norimode™</li> <li>■ Imodium™</li> </ul>	Slow down the motility (movement) of the bowel to control diarrhoea	Abdominal cramps, dizziness, drowsiness and skin reactions
<b>Opioid pain-killers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Codeine phosphate</li> <li>■ Morphine</li> </ul>	Slow down the motility of the bowel and so these drugs may be used to control diarrhoea	Abdominal pain
<b>Antispasmodic drugs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Dicycloverine</li> <li>■ Hyoscine</li> <li>■ Atropine</li> </ul>	Slow down the motility of the bowel to control diarrhoea	Bloating, heartburn, constipation, dry mouth
<b>Rehydration preparations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Dioralyte™</li> <li>■ Electrolade™</li> </ul>	Replace fluid and electrolytes lost through diarrhoea	Nausea, abdominal cramps, bloating

\* Note: Do not take Loperamide for more than two days for treatment of diarrhoea without checking with your doctor or nurse

## In summary

It is widely recognised that diarrhoea can be a serious problem and, if left untreated, can have a huge impact on your quality of life. In order to prevent diarrhoea becoming a long-term problem for you, it is important to understand the potential causes of diarrhoea in AL amyloidosis and to try to adopt some of the self-management strategies outlined in this Infosheet.

## About this Infosheet

The information in this Infosheet is not meant to replace the advice of your medical team. They are the people to ask if you have questions about your individual situation. All Myeloma UK publications are extensively reviewed by patients and healthcare professionals prior to publication.

## Other information available from Myeloma UK

Myeloma UK provides a wide range of information covering all aspects of the treatment and management of AL amyloidosis.

For a full publication list visit [www.myeloma.org.uk/publications](http://www.myeloma.org.uk/publications)

To order your free copies contact Myeloma UK. Our information is also available to download at [www.myeloma.org.uk](http://www.myeloma.org.uk)

To talk to one of our Myeloma Information Specialists about any aspect of AL amyloidosis, call the Myeloma Infoline on **0800 980 3332** or **1800 937 773** from Ireland.

Information and support about AL amyloidosis is also available around the clock at [www.myeloma.org.uk/amyloidosis](http://www.myeloma.org.uk/amyloidosis)

# Notes

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**Myeloma Awareness Week 21 - 28 June**