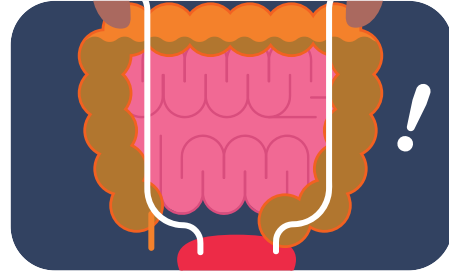


## Patient presenting with **Diarrhoea**



### Over-the-counter conversations:

When responding to symptoms in the pharmacy, it is important to establish which medications a patient is taking. This is because:

- It could be a side effect to a medicine
- It could be a reason to stop a medicine
- It can influence the over-the-counter advice/treatments you can recommend

You may want to incorporate the following questions into your conversations:

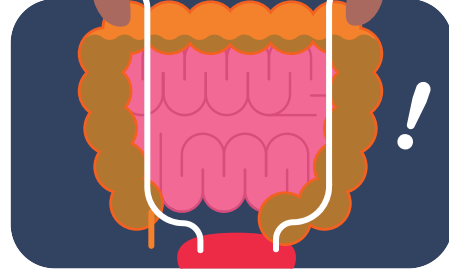
- Do you take any medicines prescribed by your GP?
- Are you on any treatment in/from the hospital?
- What condition do you have hospital treatment for?

**IF A PATIENT IS ON CANCER TREATMENT OR TREATMENT FROM THE HOSPITAL,  
ALWAYS REFER TO YOUR PHARMACIST FOR FURTHER ASSESSMENT AND ADVICE.**

The full Let's Communicate Cancer course is available by clicking [here](#)

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## Patient presenting with Diarrhoea



### Pharmacist Intervention:

#### Assess the symptom

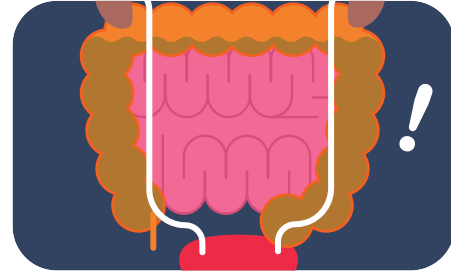
When assessing the patient's symptoms, it is important to try and address the following:

1. What type of cancer treatment they are receiving
  - Chemotherapy/Radiotherapy/Immunotherapy/Surgery
  - Route of administration - Oral/Injection/Infusion
2. Whether the symptom they are experiencing is a side effect that the hospital has made them aware of
  - Certain cancer treatments e.g. irinotecan can cause diarrhoea
3. Has the hospital provided any advice or medicines on how to manage this side effect(s)
  - Some treatment regimens with agents that are known to cause a lot of diarrhoea, may send patients home with supportive loperamide to use either regularly or when required
4. The outcome of following this advice or supportive medications is to try and manage the side effect(s)
  - Has the patient taken any loperamide yet?
  - How often?
  - Any improvement in symptoms?

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## Patient presenting with Diarrhoea



### Pharmacist Intervention (continued)

#### Assess the severity of the symptom

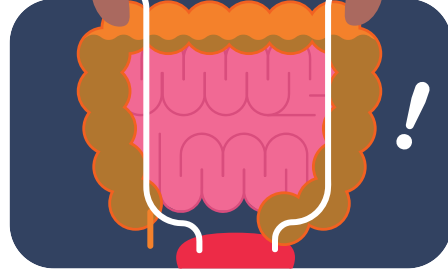
Ask patient about their normal frequency of opening bowels prior to starting cancer treatment and assess the severity (grade) of diarrhoea they are experiencing using the table below:

Grade	0	1	2	3	4
Change from normal?	No change from normal bowel habits	Mild – increase of up to 3 bowel movements a day over pre-treatment normal	Moderate – 4-6 bowel movements a day over pre-treatment normal	Severe – 7-9 bowel movements a day over pre-treatment normal	>10 bowel movements a day over pre-treatment normal or grossly bloody diarrhoea
Action	OTC advice / treatment	OTC advice / treatment	OTC advice/ treatment If diarrhoea persists after taking loperamide escalate to severe grading	Referral to cancer team	Refer to the cancer team

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## Patient presenting with Diarrhoea



### Advice and over the counter treatments which can be provided in the pharmacy **GRADE 0/GRADE 1-2**

- Drink plenty of water
- Use oral rehydration sachets to amend electrolyte imbalance and loperamide to try and stop the diarrhoea
- Eat small meals regularly
- Offer dietary advice -eat foods that are easy to digest e.g. rice, white bread, pasta, steamed chicken, white fish, jelly. Avoid foods that are fried, spicy or fatty. Avoid dairy products and milk. Avoid raw fruit and vegetables. Avoid caffeine and alcohol

### When to refer cross sector primary/secondary care **GRADE 2/GRADE 3-4**

Patients currently receiving immunotherapies, or who have received immunotherapy treatment(s) within the past 12 months, who experience diarrhoea should be referred to their cancer team for assessment. Diarrhoea can be a serious severe adverse effect for these patients that may require hospital admission.

Advise patient to contact their hospital,

- If their diarrhoea does not settle with loperamide or they have grossly bloody diarrhoea
- If they have temperature of 37.5°C or higher and/or have chills, sweats, shivers or shakes
- If they have signs of dehydration e.g. light-headed, dizzy, confused, reduced urine output, headache, heart palpitations

### How to refer cross sector primary/secondary care

- Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) in hospital cancer care team
- 24-hour hospital cancer treatment "hotline"

### Additional Support

Comprehensive information regarding individual cancers, or cancer treatments, is available from the **Macmillan website**

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