

Taking loperamide (Imodium™) for loose stools or diarrhoea

Loperamide is useful for thickening and drying up loose or liquid stools. Loperamide can also firm up soft stools.

Important points to remember

- Loperamide often work best to prevent problems with diarrhoea or loose stool rather than treating it once it starts
- It often works better taken in regular small doses than in larger doses at varying times
- Loperamide works better and has much more predictable effects if taken 30 - 60 minutes before eating
- It is safe to take long term if necessary.

How does loperamide work?

When you eat, food is initially stored in the stomach, mixed up and then slowly released into the intestine to be broken down and taken into the body. Loperamide works by slowing down the bowel movements and by decreasing the fluid secretion (production). This gives more time for the body to absorb fluid from the stools. The longer food takes to pass through the bowel, the more time there is for fluid to be absorbed from the bowel and the firmer the stools are likely to become.

Loperamide also makes the muscles around the anus work more effectively, and so sometimes is better for people who have leakage or incontinence of stool.

Side effects of loperamide

Occasionally it causes rashes or abdominal cramps.

Suggested doses

A suggested starting dose of loperamide will have been discussed with you. The ideal dose will vary depending why you are using it. If you have diarrhoea caused by chemotherapy, your doctors may want you to take very large doses of loperamide very quickly.

If you have the unusual condition called short bowel syndrome, again, you may need very large doses of these tablets but they will probably be increased gradually to see how well they work.

The usual maximum dose of loperamide is 16 milligrams per day. It is very unusual for people to need to take the full dose and if you are taking that much or more, you should check with



your doctors that you are taking it correctly. If you take too much loperamide, constipation is induced and then only liquid parts can 'flow' away (overflow diarrhoea).

For most people who have long term problems with looser stools after cancer treatment, they will need to experiment to find the dose that will control their bowels without causing constipation.

People vary in their response to these medicines. The more you take the firmer your stools should become. If you take more than you need, you may feel constipated or get pain in your abdomen or back. If you do not take enough, your stools will remain loose or soft.

It is usual to start on a low dose and build it up if necessary. If your bowels are irregular, you should probably stick to one dose for a week or ten days. You can then decide how effective the dose is or consider changing it. Often the medicine becomes more effective after a few days.

Loperamide comes in either a capsule or liquid (syrup). The different doses are shown below:

| Type of form of loperamide | Exact dose |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| One capsule | 2 milligrams |
| One teaspoon of syrup (5 ml) | 1 milligram |
| Half a teaspoon of syrup (2.5 ml) | 0.5 milligrams |

Contact details

GIANTS (GI and Nutrition Team Service) 020 7811 8216 or 8106
A member of your medical team
Your Clinical Nurse Specialist or Research Nurse
Pharmacy Medicines Helpline via the Hotline below

Alternatively, please call

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899
(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

