

CONSTIPATION

The following information will help manage the effects you may experience from your cancer treatment. Your treatment team will provide you with any additional information you need. Please ask them any questions you may have.

WHAT IS CONSTIPATION?

Constipation is the failure of the bowel to empty itself thoroughly and comfortably. It is far more common in cancer patients than diarrhea, particularly when patients are taking pain medications.

Not having a daily bowel movement does not mean you are constipated. It may be normal for a person to have two or three bowel movements a day or one bowel movement, without difficulty, every third or fourth day. Patterns vary from person to person.

WHAT CAUSES CONSTIPATION?

- Pain medications
- Constipating drugs (chemotherapy with Velban or Vincristine, antihistamines, diuretics, tranquilizers, antidepressant drugs, antacids or iron supplements)
- A low-fiber diet
- Insufficient fluid intake
- Reduced exercise or lack of physical exercise

- Abuse of laxatives in place of establishing a normal bowel routine
 - Disregarding or delaying the urge to move the bowels
 - Possibly cancer itself or surgery
 - Patients experiencing anxiety or stress
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HOW DO THE BOWELS WORK?

One of the most important functions of the bowel is to eliminate waste matter from the body.

“Mass Peristalsis” is a progressive wave of contractions in the bowel that forces waste from the rectum. It often occurs after eating or drinking since it is stimulated by filling the stomach.

PREVENTION OR RELIEF OF CONSTIPATION

- Relax regularly and eat your meals in a leisurely manner.
- Eat a varied diet with plenty of fish, chicken or turkey, and low-fat dairy products.
- Include foods high in fiber such as fruit and vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals, beans, peas or lentils. If you use supplemental nutritional drinks, try to use them between meals, not in place of a meal.
- Drink eight or more eight-ounce glasses of water each day.
- Moderate exercise can tone up your entire body and help with a “sluggish” bowel. Try taking a walk after meals.
- Establish a regular time for going to the bathroom. If you feel the urge to move your bowels, don’t put it off.

- Know your normal bowel patterns and follow the bowel protocol if you are not maintaining your normal bowel pattern.
 - If you have problems with hemorrhoids, ask your doctor for measures or medications to relieve the discomfort associated with them.
 - Notify your doctor if you have sudden unexplainable changes in your bowel function or in the color or size of stools, if rectal bleeding occurs or constipation persists after using the bowel protocol or recurs frequently.
 - The goal is have a bowel movement at least every two days. If your pain medication dosage is changed, you may need to adjust your daily dose of laxative.
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72 HOUR BOWEL PROTOCOL FOR CONSTIPATION

- Take two Senokot-S tablets at bedtime (continue one to two tablets a day to prevent constipation).
- If there is no bowel movement in the morning, take two Senokot-S after breakfast (continue one to two tablets a day to prevent constipation).
- If there is no bowel movement in the evening, take three Senokot-S tablets at bedtime (continue one to two tablets a day to prevent constipation).
- If there is no bowel movement in the morning, take four Senokot-S tablets after breakfast and then four Senokot-S tablets at bedtime (continue one to two tablets a day to prevent constipation).

- If there is no bowel movement within 48 hours after this protocol, add two tablespoons of Milk of Magnesia after breakfast and dinner while continuing to take up to eight Senokot-S tablets a day.
- If there is no bowel movement within 72 hours after starting this protocol, add one 10 mg Dulcolax suppository or a Fleet's enema.
- Notify your doctor if there is still no bowel movement within 72 hours after starting this protocol

AFTER HOURS

If you need immediate emergency medical attention, please dial 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. All other medical attention outside of the Center's regular office hours (8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday) will be answered by our telephone answering service who will have a doctor from Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center return your call.

TELEPHONE:

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