

## Prevention and Management of Constipation

This guide will help you to prevent constipation and maintain normal bowel movements.

### Symptoms and Description:

Constipation are stools that are too hard, too small, too difficult to expel, and not regular. This means being unable to move your bowels as you normally would. If you are passing dry or hard stool, passing small amounts of stool, having to push harder to move your bowels, or moving them less often than usual, you may be suffering from constipation.

You are at risk for constipation if you:

- Have a decrease in the amount you eat and drink each day
- Have a decrease in your activity or exercise
- Take medications that cause constipation
- Resist the urge to pass stool
- Try to pass stool on a bedpan, rather than getting to a toilet
- Are taking pain medications
- Are receiving chemotherapy

Keeping your bowel routine regular and your bowel movements easy to pass is important. Your bowels should move as they normally did before you got sick, with little or no strain. Your physician or nurse may ask you to keep a diary of your bowel activity. This diary will ask you to describe the frequency, amount and type of stool you pass or when the last time it was that you were able to pass stool.

What can you do to prevent constipation?

- Do not resist the urge to pass stool
- Sit in an upright position when passing stool
- If possible, sit on the toilet or bedside toilet
- Drink at least 8-10 glasses of fluid each day
- Have a warm or hot drink (senna tea) 30 minutes before usual bedtime
- Eat foods that are high in dietary fiber, at least 20-35 grams per day, especially whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, seeds and nuts
- Exercise daily (If you are unable to increase your exercise, tighten and relax the muscles in your abdomen and move your legs often while sitting in bed.
- Take medications as instructed, to prevent constipation

## What To Do When Constipated

Increase fluid intake and foods high in fiber; whole grains, fruits and vegetables. Some chemotherapies can cause constipation. Your nurse will go over the possible side effects of each individual drug when you are starting treatment. The anti-nausea medications that must be taken after chemotherapy may also be constipating. Pain medication, especially prescription narcotics are constipating.

Bowels may be kept regular by taking Colace-2 times a day, and 2 Senna tablets at night. The Colace softens the stool while the Senna adds fiber to bulk the stool, allowing it to move. Milk of Magnesia may be used with this regimen, as needed. (Follow package instructions).

Miralax taken once a day may also be effective in relieving constipation related to chemotherapy, anti-nausea meds and pain meds. This medication comes in powder form and is now available over the counter.

For severe constipation, use Magnesium Citrate. This is sold over the counter. Drink half the bottle. After a couple of hours, if there is no bowel movement, drink the other half of the bottle with a tablespoon of mineral oil.

If diarrhea occurs, stop all stool softeners and laxatives.