

Constipation

Constipation is difficulty passing stools or a decrease in the number of stools. It may be accompanied by gas, abdominal cramping, nausea, or pressure in the lower abdomen. Constipation may lead to stool impaction, a severe form of constipation where the stool will no longer pass through the colon or rectum. Constipation occurs in 40-70% of cancer patients and is due to a number of reasons. Prevention is important!

Prevention of Constipation- it is easier to prevent than treat:

Increase your intake of fluids (goal is 6 to 8 eight ounce glasses of **water** daily)

Increase dietary fiber and exercise if you are able- fruit, vegetables, and beans- high-fiber foods stimulate the intestines to move. Exercise helps stimulate digestion and prevent constipation. Moderate activity such as walking will help.

Medications for prevention of constipation:

- 1- **Miralax** 17g 1-2 times daily OR
- 2- **Docusate (stool softner)** - up to 2 tablets 3 times a day (generic OK)
- 3- **Docusate and Senna** (laxative and stool softner combination product) start with 2 tablets at bedtime; may increase up to 8 tablets in 24 hours

Treatment of constipation: If you become constipated (no Bowel Movement in 2 days) start the following and continue your prevention medications from above:

- 1- **Milk of Magnesia** 30 ml 1-2 times daily
- 2- **Stimulant Laxatives**
 - Bisacodyl: 5-15 mg daily by mouth or rectally (suppository)
 - Senokot: 2 tablets twice daily, may titrate up to 2 tablets four times a day
 - Senokot-XTRA: 1 tablet daily, may titrate up to 2 tablets twice a day
- 3- **Magnesium Citrate** 1/2 – 1 bottle (may repeat next day if needed)

Talk to your health care provider before using an enema or suppository.

Causes of Constipation Constipation is caused by a slowing of the intestinal activity. The normal wave-like action of the intestines, called peristalsis, serves to continually move stools out of the body. When peristalsis slows, the stools become hard, dry, and difficult to pass.

- Pain medications
- Chemotherapy drugs
- Decreased activity
- Poor diet
- Inadequate fluid intake

Chemotherapy drugs can cause either an increase or a decrease in peristalsis (your body's ability to push food through the gastrointestinal track). An increase in intestinal activity may cause stools to travel faster and be less formed, resulting in cramping or diarrhea. A decrease in intestinal activity may cause stools to travel more slowly, becoming hard and dry and more difficult to pass, which is constipation.

Diagnosing Constipation Symptoms of constipation include:

- A sustained decrease in the frequency of bowel movements from normal. There is actually no "normal" schedule for bowel movements; everyone's schedule is different. If you normally move your bowels once per day, a change in bowel movements may be every second or third day.
- Hard, difficult-to-pass bowel movements you may pass small, marble-like pieces of stool without a satisfactory elimination, or watery type stools.
- Cramping or gas
- Nausea
- If your doctor approves, exercise daily. Exercise helps stimulate digestion and prevent constipation. Moderate activity such as walking will help.

For more information feel free to visit www.chemocare.com