

Constipation (unable to move your bowels)

Constipation is difficulty moving your bowels. Stools are hard and may be painful to pass. There is a feeling that the bowel is not empty.

Constipation may be caused by your cancer or when:

- you eat differently
- you are taking medications for pain or nausea
- you are less active

Regular bowel movements happen every one to three days. They should be soft and easy to pass. Even if you are not eating as much as usual, you still need to have a bowel movement.

Constipation can:

- increase nausea and vomiting
- increase abdominal bloating and pain
- decrease your appetite
- lead to straining that can cause a rectal tear or hemorrhoids and bleeding. This can increase your risk of infection.

Call your nurse or doctor if you have:

- not had a bowel movement within three days
- abdominal or rectal pain
- vomiting

Tips to help you with constipation:

- Eat high fibre foods like whole grain breads, cereals, fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Fluids help to keep the stool soft.

- Prune juice and warm liquids may be helpful.
- Try to walk 15-30 minutes each day or try other activities such as cycling or swimming.
- Eat at the same time each day.
- Try to have a bowel movement at the same time each day.

Medications for constipation:

Constipation is a common side effect when using some pain and nausea medications. Your nurse or doctor will suggest medication to help prevent or to relieve constipation. These include:

- stool softeners which make the stool softer and easier to pass.
Example: Docusate sodium or Docusate calcium
- laxatives which cause the bowels to move.
Example: Senokot

These do not include:

- bulk forming fibre supplements. These are not advised for people on some pain and nausea medications or for those who have poor fluid intake.
Example: Metamucil

A laxative should be taken if you do not have a bowel movement two days after starting a stool softener.

Be sure to follow the package instructions. If you do not understand the instructions or have questions or concerns, please contact your nurse.