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Common Questions
about constipation,
what the causes of
it are and how we can
treat the problem

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*Please do not hesitate to consult your
health care professional if you have any
questions or concerns*



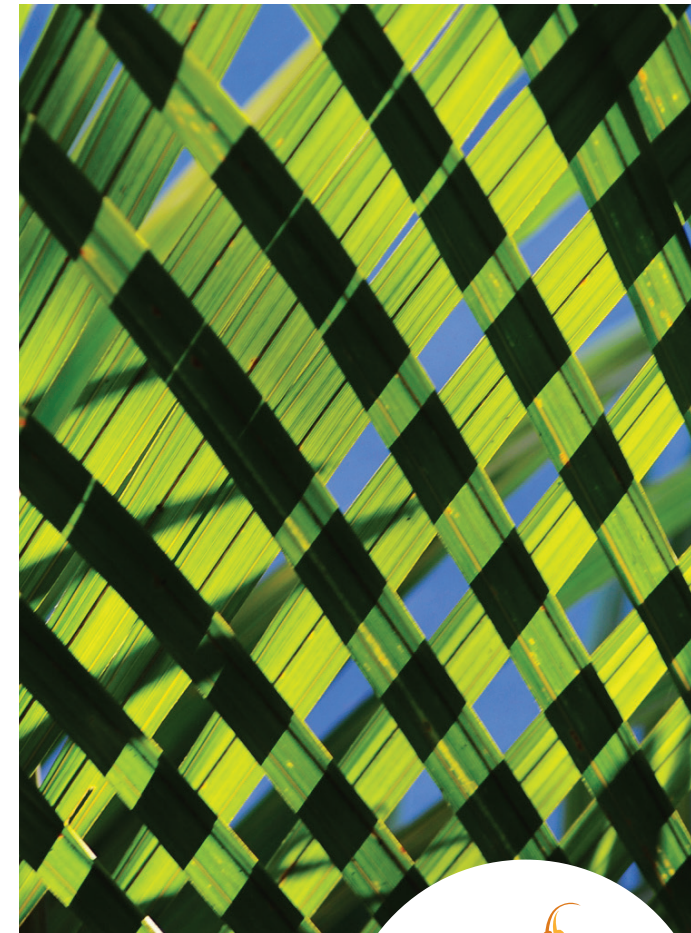
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Constipation

Common Questions



Common Questions

What is constipation?

- Everyone is different, so bowel habits vary.
- Constipation is when bowel movements happen less often than is normal for you.
- When constipated passing stool can be painful and difficult. The stool passed will be dry, hard and a small amount.
- You may feel the need to move your bowel but be unable to pass any stool or feel you have not fully finished.

How common is it?

- Constipation is very common and is something most people with a serious illness will experience.
- It can have unpleasant effects on your overall wellbeing and ability to enjoy life.
- Constipation can cause great discomfort and suffering if not managed properly.

What may cause constipation?

- Serious illness/disease
- Immobility
- Tiredness
- Poor food/fluid intake
- Older age
- Lack of time, privacy
- Inability to get to the toilet—fear of incontinence
- Medications—many medicines can cause it

Management

- The best way to manage constipation is to avoid it occurring.
- Your nurse/doctor will talk to you about the best way to keep your bowel functioning well.

Medications

- Strong pain medications such as codine, tramadol, morphine and oxycodone are known to cause constipation.
- If you are taking strong pain medication you should also be taking laxatives.
- Ondansetron taken for nausea is also very constipating.

Signs and Symptoms

- Bowels moving less than normal (less than 3x/week)
- Difficulty passing stool-straining/pain/bleeding
- Hard, dry stool
- Only passing small amounts
- Feeling like you need to pass more
- Bloating
- Tummy pain/cramps
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea (feeling sick)
- Vomiting
- Generally feeling unwell
- Difficulty passing urine

Sometimes constipation can cause “overflow diarrhoea”. This happens when there is hard stool to pass.

In severe constipation a total bowel blockage can develop. This is a bowel obstruction and needs medical attention.

When should I talk to my Nurse/Dr?

Your Hospice Nurse will review your bowel frequency at each visit.

If you have not opened your bowels for more than 3 days or have any symptoms listed in this leaflet please call your nurse or doctor.

Key Points

- If you are taking strong pain medication you should also be taking a laxative.
- Keep as mobile as you can.
- Eat a healthy, varied diet if you are able to including fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Kiwi-crush, prunes etc... can be useful.
- Keep a record of your bowel movements.
- Make sure you are sitting comfortably on the toilet.
- Allow enough time on the toilet.
- Try sitting on the toilet half an hour after breakfast to develop a routine.
- Laxative doses may vary day to day according to your need.

Laxatives Commonly Used

Laxol Tablets (Small brown tablets)

- Stimulant and softner-these soften stool and encourage the bowel to work.
- Doses vary-usually 1-2 once or twice a day or as advised by your doctor.

Lactulose (Sweet Liquid)

- Draws fluid into the bowel to soften the stool.
- Usually 10-20ml once or twice daily as advised by your doctor.

Lax-Sachets (Powder made up into a drink)

- Increases the volume of the stool.
- As directed by your doctor.

Suppositories/Enema

- Inserted into the rectum by the nurse or patient when oral medication not effective.