66

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



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
- $\cdot\,$ 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 then 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.
- $\cdot\,$ 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)

- $\cdot\,$ 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)

- $\cdot\,$ 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.