



SYMPTOM MANAGEMENT: Constipation

Constipation is a condition of the digestive system in which bowel movements occur less frequently, as compared to usual and stool may become hard, dry and/or difficult to pass.

Constipation in patients with cancer may be a chronic condition or a condition not related to cancer. Constipation can occur because medication side effects (i.e., anti-nausea medications and pain medications), not being as active, having difficulty staying hydrated, as a result of medication side effects or cancer treatment.

Constipation can make it harder to eat and drink as usual, which can lead to fatigue and feeling unwell. Effective prevention and management of constipation is important and will make a big difference in the way you feel.

Keys to Preventing Constipation

Hydration: Aim to drink 6-8 glasses of fluid per day, especially water. You should drink enough fluid to keep your urine clear/ light yellow.

Examples of non-caffeinated beverages are water, juice, and herbal tea.

Nutrition: Eating foods high in fiber may help to relieve constipation. Fiber helps only if you are active and drinking plenty of liquids daily. Try to limit your intake of foods that can contribute to constipation (i.e., caffeine, alcohol, cheese, meat, rice, bananas, and breads).

Examples of high fiber foods include whole grain breads and cereals, dried fruits wheat bran, wheat germ, fresh fruits and vegetables, oats, barley, and brown rice.

If you have been advised to avoid fiber rich foods, check with your provider or dietitian for recommendations.

Activity: Being active helps stimulate digestion. Small amounts of activity throughout the day are encouraged, while balancing rest periods.

An example of activity is walking, up to 30 minutes per day, with rest periods, as needed. Walking can be done over one continuous period or broken up over a few walks during the day.

Please be aware of any personal limitations when choosing an activity.

Respond: Always respond to a bowel movement as soon as possible. Frequency of BM varies from daily to once every 2-3 days and will vary between individuals.

*If you are following the **Constipation Management** recommendations, and it is not working or you have questions, call our office to speak with one of our oncology nurses.*



Managing Constipation

Instructions: Start at Step 1 and escalate as needed. Remember to continue drinking adequate fluids, eating foods high in fiber (unless advised otherwise), and being active, as tolerated. Continue the regimen as a maintenance dose as needed.

May be helpful to keep track until you achieve regularity (see sample bowel tracker on following page).

Step 1:

*Senna 8.6 mg, 2 tablets by mouth daily (takes up to 6-12 hours to work).

If no results in 24 hours, then move on to Step 2.

Step 2:

*Senna 8.6 mg, 2 tablets by mouth twice daily (takes up to 6-12 hours to work)

**Polyethylene glycol (MiraLAX) 17 grams by mouth daily (takes up to 1-4 days to work)

If no results in 24 hours, then go to Step 3.

Step 3:

*Senna 8.6 mg, 2-4 tablets by mouth twice daily (takes up to 6-12 hours to work)

**Polyethylene glycol (MiraLAX) 17 grams by mouth daily (takes up to 1-4 days to work)

If no results in 24 hours, then call our office and speak with one of our nurses.

**Senna/ Senokot/ sennosides are all the same. Available over the counter.*

***Polyethylene glycol (MiraLax) is available over the counter.*

****If you develop loose stools or diarrhea, STOP the constipation management medications for 24 hours and then restart at one step lower.**

When to Contact Your Health Care Provider:

- Pain in your stomach
- Fever
- You are unable to pass gas
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- If your stomach looks swollen and/or feels hard to the touch

References:

Uptodate.com (Medications for treatment of constipation), Oncology Nursing Society: PEP Constipation, and Chemocare.com



Sample Bowel Tracker:

Instructions: Track whether you had a bowel movement (BM), whether it was "normal", how much fluid you drank that day, whether you engaged in any activity, and what you are doing/ taking for constipation management.

	BM: Y or N	N= Normal L= Loose C= Difficult to pass/ constipated	# Of glasses of fluid	Activity: Y or N	Constipation Management Interventions and Notes:
Sunday					
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					