

# Constipation

## Constipation and Chemotherapy

### What is constipation and how is it related to chemotherapy and other cancer treatments?

Constipation is “abnormally delayed or infrequent passage of usually dry, hardened feces (stool or bowel movement).”

- Some people get constipated because they do not eat enough fruit and fiber, do not exercise or get enough activity, and/or do not drink enough fluids (most people should drink at least 8 glasses of water or other non-alcoholic drinks per day).
- Certain medical conditions and medications can cause constipation. For example, some chemotherapy drugs can result in constipation. Also, many pain medications cause constipation as a side effect.
- There are many things that patients can do to prevent or relieve constipation. Also, there are many medications your doctor can recommend for constipation.

### What are some constipation symptoms to look for?

- Infrequent bowel movements. There is no “normal” schedule for bowel movements. “Frequent” or “infrequent” should be determined based on your own “normal” schedule. For example, if you normally move your bowels once per day, “infrequent” may be defined as every 2nd or 3rd day. This should be a consistent change, not a one time occurrence.
- Hard, difficult to pass bowel movements. Often, a person will pass small marble-like pieces of stool, without a satisfactory elimination.

### Important Signs and Symptoms to report to doctor or nurse today:

- Distended abdomen and or abdominal pain.
- No bowel movement for more than 2-3 days.
- Dizziness and or confusion.
- Back pain.
- Leaking stool.
- Fever.
- No bowel movements with nausea and vomiting.

### Your Goals:

- ✓Prevent constipation and recognize symptoms early.
- ✓Get professional help when needed.

### What You Can Do At Home to Prevent Constipation:

- ✓Drink plenty of fluid. Try to drink at least 8 cups of liquid daily. Drinking hot water upon rising in the morning can stimulate the bowels.
- ✓Eat food high in fiber when possible. Fiber includes: fruits, figs, dates, prunes or prune juice, vegetables, and grains. Ask your nurse if you would like consultation with the dietician.
- ✓If you are taking pain medication ask your doctor or nurse about the use of laxatives and stool softeners. Most people need to take stool softeners (like DSS) or laxatives (like Senna) when using pain pills. These are mild laxatives that are not too harsh on your GI system.
- ✓Keep as physically active as possible.