



MANAGING CONSTIPATION

Constipation may be generally described as difficulty having bowel movements or having chronic hard stool. Constipation can be (and frequently is) very uncomfortable and, if left unresolved for too long, can involve uncomfortable remedies.

Signs and Symptoms of Constipation:

- Reduced and/or difficulty passing stools (straining)
- Lumpy/hard stools
- Feeling as though the rectum is blocked, preventing bowel movement
- Feeling as though the rectal vault is not empty after passing stool
- Needing help to pass stool (pressing on the belly; using a finger to remove stool)

Complications of Constipation:

- Impaction (total inability to pass stool with hard stool becoming trapped in the intestines)
- Bowel incontinence (the leakage of liquid stool around the impacted hard, trapped stool)
- Hemorrhoids.

How You Can Help:

- Increase daily fiber (18-30g/day), add wheat bran to your diet
- Fiber supplements should be discussed with your Care Team prior to taking them
- Drink plenty of water, avoiding alcohol and caffeine containing fluids
- Exercise within your body's tolerance level
- Try resting your feet on a low stool while sitting on the toilet – knees should be higher than hips
- Try to establish a daily routine – find a daily time when you can relax and spend the necessary time emptying your bowels
- Take laxatives ordered by your Physician or Nurse Practitioner
- Walk or sit upright after meals to assist with digestion
- Keep a record of your bowel movements, including:
 - Date/time
 - Consistency
 - Any uncomfortable symptoms (nausea, cramping, bloating).
 - Any mechanical difficulties passing stool (straining, feeling of incomplete emptying, diarrhea, hemorrhoid pain, bleeding)

Tell Your Care Team About:

- Any change in your bowel habit
- Not having a bowel movement for 3 or more days
- Pain, cramping, tenderness
- Nausea/vomiting
- Bloody and/or runny stools



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Remember – constipation is common amongst those people taking narcotics. As the dose of the narcotic rises, the need for additional laxatives will also rise.

Managing Constipation with Laxatives

General Comments:

- Constipation is common especially when taking many types of medications to treat pain.
- The good news is that constipation due to pain medication is usually easy to manage with laxatives.
- The most commonly laxative we use is a plant-based laxative “sennosides;”
 - Sennosides are found in “Senna” or “Senna/Docu” (also known as “Senna-S”) that you may receive from Pikes Peak Hospice & Palliative Care. Senna/Docu includes a stool softener to help make stools softer.

Start:

- Begin at Step 1 unless you are switching for a different laxative or unless otherwise directed by your nurse or Physician/Nurse Practitioner.

How to Adjust:

- If you have not had a bowel movement after 2 days on Step 1, got to the next step.
- Thereafter, if you do not have a bowel movement after 1 day at a Step, got to the next step.
- If you are able to have a bowel movement which is soft and comfortable to pass at least every 2-3 days at a Step, stay at the same Step.
- If you have loose stools more frequently than your usual pattern, stop taking your laxatives until you have a normal bowel movement and then go back a Step (that is, if you were at Step 3, go back to Step 2).

Other Comments:

- If you have severe cramps, stop taking your laxative and call Pikes Peak Hospice & Palliative Care to speak with a nurse.
- If 3 or more days pass without a bowel movement, and this is not normal for you, please call Pikes Peak Hospice & Palliative Care to speak with a nurse.
- If you have low platelets or low white blood cells, suppositories might not be recommend – ask your Physician/Nurse Practitioner or nurse.
- A glycerin adult suppository can help lubricate the stool if it is hard and uncomfortable to pass.



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| Step | Breakfast | Lunch | Bedtime |
|------|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | | | 2 tablets of Senna or Senna/Docu |
| 2 | 2 tablets of Senna or Senna/Docu | | 2 tablets of Senna or Senna/Docu |
| 3 | 2 tablets of Senna or Senna/Docu | 2 tablets of Senna or Senna/Docu | 2 tablets of Senna or Senna/Docu |
| 4 | 3 tablets of Senna or Senna/Docu | 3 tablets of Senna or Senna/Docu | 3 tablets of Senna or Senna/Docu |
| 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue Step 4 • Unwrap and insert an adult bisacodyl suppository into your rectum (see Other Comments above). • Keep suppository in place for at least 15 minutes. • If still no bowel movement after 1 hour, call Pikes Peak Hospice & Palliative Care to speak with a nurse. | | |

Need more information or help? Call 633-3400 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to get live help. Thank you for letting us help care for you and your loved ones.