

Preventing, Managing and Treating Constipation

Constipation is common in patients with cancer. Chemotherapy, pain medication and decreased activity can all slow bowel movement.

What to do

- Drinking lots of fluids is very important — 8 to 10 cups or 2 to 3 liters of liquid each day — unless otherwise unless instructed by your doctor.
- Try to eat at the same times each day.
- Eat foods high in fiber (e.g., uncooked fruits with the skin on, leafy green vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals, fresh raw fruits with skins and seeds).
- Add 1 or 2 tbsps of unprocessed bran to your food. This adds bulk and helps with bowel movements. Sprinkle on food at mealtimes.
- Avoid foods and drinks that cause gas, such as cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, cucumbers, dried beans, peas, onions and carbonated drinks if they don't work for you.
- Get as much exercise as you can, even if that means only walking a very short distance.
- When on the toilet, try using a small footstool to help relax the muscles for easier bowel movement.
- Try to have a bowel movement whenever you have the urge.
- If you are confined to bed, try to use the toilet or bedside commode when you have a bowel movement. Check with your doctor or nurse first to see if it is safe to leave the bed.



What not to do

- Do not strain or use extreme force when trying to move your bowels.
- Do not use suppositories or enemas unless first instructed by your doctor.

When to call your doctor or nurse

- If any over-the-counter laxative or medications do not work after 24 hours
- If your constipation is still a problem and you are having discomfort
- If you do not have a bowel movement for more than three days
- If at any time you develop rectal bleeding, fever and chills, or severe abdominal pain, please contact your medical team immediately.