

Managing Constipation for Gastrointestinal Cancer Patients

What is constipation?

Constipation is a common side effect of many gastrointestinal (GI) cancer treatments. You have constipation when any of these things happen:

- Your stool is hard.
- It is difficult to pass a bowel movement.
- It has been more than 36 hours since your last bowel movement.

How can I manage my constipation?

You can get stool softeners and laxatives at the drugstore.

- Senna-S
- MiraLAX®
- Milk of Magnesia

Follow this schedule to help manage constipation:

1. Take 2 tablets of Senna-S twice a day, morning and night. If you do not have a bowel movement after 24 hours, move to step 2.
2. Keep taking Senna-S as in step 1. Add MiraLAX once a day. Follow the directions on the bottle. If you do not have a bowel movement within 24 hours of taking MiraLAX, move to step 3.
3. Keep taking Senna-S and MiraLAX as in step 2. Add 2 tablespoons (30 mL) Milk of Magnesia at bedtime.

If you still do not have a bowel movement after taking Milk of Magnesia, call your nurse at the number below.

Your nurse may recommend other medicines from the drugstore. If they do not help, the nurse will ask you to come to the clinic for an enema. Your doctor may also prescribe stronger medicine, if you need it.

If the medicines give you watery or loose stools (diarrhea), stop taking them until diarrhea goes away for 24 hours. If you do not have a bowel movement within another 24 hours, start again with step 1. Move to steps 2 and 3 if needed.

Questions or concerns?

Please call your nurse at the number below.

801-587-7000

Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

After hours, weekends or holidays, ask for the cancer doctor on call.