

Managing Constipation

What is Constipation?

Constipation is when it is difficult to have a bowel movement. The stool becomes hard and dry. Other signs of constipation include:

- Bloating
- Feeling full after a bowel movement
- Nausea
- Rectal pain
- Stomach cramping

What Causes Constipation?

Constipation occurring during cancer treatment has many causes:

- Bowel blockage
- Dehydration
- Decreased food intake or a low-fiber diet
- Some chemotherapy and pain medicines
- Surgery in the abdomen
- Tumor growth

How Can I Prevent Constipation?

You can help prevent constipation in these ways:

- Talk with your health care team about a plan to manage constipation before you start pain or chemotherapy medicines.
- Drink more water, juice, and other beverages that do not contain caffeine or alcohol.
- Be active. Ask your health care provider what kind of exercise is best for you.

It may be helpful to continue taking a stool softener daily.

How Should I Treat Constipation?

If you become constipated, you may try treating yourself at home. Certain products you can buy at the pharmacy or grocery store may help.

1. Take 2 Senna-S® (Senna + Colace®) tablets at night.
2. If you do not have a bowel movement the next morning, take 2 Senna-S tablets that morning and two more that night.
3. Drink 4 to 8 ounces of warm prune juice that evening. Prune juice can be a helpful part of a daily bowel management plan.
4. Once you have a bowel movement, stop taking Senna-S. It may be helpful to continue taking a stool softener daily.

When Should I Call My Doctor's Office?

If you do not have a bowel movement the morning after following steps 1-3 above, talk with your health care team. They can suggest additional remedies for constipation.

Important Precautions

- If you have kidney or urinary problems, ask your health care team before using milk of magnesia.
- Talk with your health care team before taking products that contain polyethylene glycol such as Miralax®.
- If you are taking chemotherapy, do not use enemas or suppositories.
- Talk with your health care team before changing doses of stool softeners or laxatives.
- Talk with your health care team about changes in your bowel habits. Bowel function is an important part of your overall health.