Patient Instructions: Constipation

Causes of Constipation

Constipation can be caused by many factors. Changes in your diet, routine, medications and activity level can all lead to problems with regular bowel movements. Many of the chemotherapy drugs we give can change your bowel habits. The chemotherapy targets fast growing cells which include the cells that line your GI tract from your mouth to the other end.

NOTE!
If none of these procedures are giving you relief, please call the Cancer Care Center at Island Hospital, (360) 299-4200, and speak with an Oncology Nurse or the Doctor on call if it is after clinic hours.

Tips for Keeping Bowel Movements Regular

Here are some tips that may help keep your bowel movements regular:

- Drink 8-10 cups of liquid each day. Try warm juices; especially prune juice, hot lemonade, tea, or water.
- Eat high-fiber and bulky foods, such as whole-grain breads and cereals and brown rice. Compare labels for fiber content. Also, fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, nuts, seeds, and dried beans may help. Have a nutritious breakfast with a hot drink and high-fiber foods. Eat at regular times each day. (Not usually effective by itself for cancer patients, use with other methods.)
- Commercial fiber products – Citrucel, Metamucil and FiberCon contain psyllium or other fruit/vegetable fiber
- Try having a bowel movement at the same time each day.
- Exercise regularly; walk daily, if possible.

Avoid these:
If gas is a problem after a few days on a high fiber diet, limit drinks and foods that cause gas, such as carbonated drinks, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumbers, beans, peas, onions. Decrease swallowed air by: not talking while eating, drinking without straws, not chewing gum.

*Contact your medical person if you have not had a bowel movement for three days or more.

Use of Laxatives
When taking regular doses of narcotic pain medication, a laxative regimen is nearly always required and should be followed carefully. The following is for Senokot, an over-the-counter laxative:

1. Take 2 tabs at bedtime, daily (skip if you have diarrhea)
2. If no BM next AM, take 2 tabs after breakfast.
3. If no BM by the second evening, take 3 tabs at bedtime.
4. If there is no BM within 48 hours after starting this routine, call your doctor’s office.

Other Laxatives
Everyone is different. Other over-the-counter laxatives may work for you:

- MOM (Milk of Magnesia) – 2 tbsp, 1-2 times per day, or
- Dulcolax tablets - 2 tabs, 1-2 times daily

Some patients get relief from Smooth Move Tea, found in the natural foods section of your grocers.
Make-at-Home Laxatives

Don’t taste during preparation! The results could last for days!

Make-at-Home Laxative Recipe 1
1 lb each prunes, raisins, and figs, pitted
1 cup brown sugar
4 oz senna tea (Smooth Move)
1 cup lemon juice

Boil 2 ½ C water. Add tea and steep 5 minutes. Strain tea & add 2 cups of tea to fruit and boil for 5 min. Remove from heat, add sugar and lemon, cool. Put in blender to make smooth paste. Keeps well in freezer (this doesn’t solidify).
Use 1 – 2 Tbsp per day.

Make-at-Home Laxative Recipe 2
8 oz dried prunes, raisins, & figs
¼ C brown sugar
2 oz senna tea leaves
¼ C lemon juice
2 ½ C water
½ C prune juice

Bring fruit, lemon juice, tea leaves and water to boil. Boil 15-20 min. Remove from heat, add sugar, cool. In food processor, turn mixture to paste while gradually adding prune juice. Store in freezer (this doesn’t solidify).
Take 1-2 tsp each morning. Good on toast or crackers.
Increase or decrease amount as needed.

Make-at-Home Laxative Recipe 3
3 parts wheat bran or 100% bran
1 part prune juice
2 parts applesauce
Mix together.
Eat 3 times per day, or as needed. Good on toast.