

CONSTIPATION

Oncology

Vitalité Zone: 1B 4 5 6

Facility: _____

What is constipation?

Constipation means that you have bowel movements (going to the bathroom) less often than usual, or the stool is dryer and harder to pass. It is considered normal to pass stool from 3 times a day at the most to 3 times a week at the least, as long as the stool is soft and easy to pass. Constipation may cause a feeling of fullness or discomfort, painful bowel movements, feeling the urge to go but no stool comes, leakage of stool and nausea or vomiting.

What to do for constipation:

Non-medical ways (non-pharmacological)

- Increase fluid intake as tolerated to 6–8 cups per day (1.5–2 L/day), unless you are on a diet that requires fluids to be restricted to a specific level.
- Eat natural laxatives (e.g. prunes, dates, etc.).
- Eat foods with natural fibre. Fibre-rich foods include fruit and vegetables, grain products and lentils. Foods such as flax seed or oat bran can be used in smoothies and other foods to increase fibre content.
- Increase fluids to match increased fibre intake to decrease bloating and distension – Remember fibre and fluid work together, so it is important to drink!
- Increase your physical activity as tolerated.
- Limit caffeine and alcohol.
- Follow a bowel routine: try to have a bowel movement at the same time of day, going to the bathroom 30 to 60 minutes after eating, and/or going when you feel the urge.

*If you are experiencing mild constipation, dietary changes may be enough to help.

*Be proactive – constipation caused by medications is easier to prevent than to treat. If you are taking a medication known to cause constipation, start prevention measures right away.

Medications (pharmacological interventions)

*Please discuss these options with the Oncology Clinic staff before starting any new supplement or medication. If you are at risk for a bowel obstruction, these interventions may not be appropriate for you.

*Medications which may be used to treat constipation include stool softeners (keep stools softer), laxatives (cause bowel to move) and on rare occasions enemas and suppositories.

*To prevent complications such as rectal tearing, fissures, infection, blood infection, and impaired absorption of medications, it is important to take constipation seriously.

You should go to the Emergency Department if...

- You continue to have constipation despite the above measures.
- You have a fever of more than 38°C.
- You experience severe cramping or sudden onset of abdominal pain.
- You experience numbness with or without weakness in your arms or legs.
- You experience nausea and vomiting with abdominal pain.
(These symptoms may indicate a bowel obstruction, which is dangerous).
- You notice red blood in your stools.
- You notice that you have very dark or black stools.
- You have not had a bowel movement in more than 3 days.

*These recommendations do not apply to you if you have a bowel narrowing, obstruction, colostomy or ileostomy. Please discuss your needs with the Oncology Clinic staff.