

Information Sheet: Cancer Treatment & Constipation

Constipation means being unable to move/open your bowels, having to push harder than normal to move your bowels, or using your bowels less often than is usual for you.

Bowel movements may be small, dry and hard. Many medications can cause constipation including some anti-nausea medications used during chemotherapy treatment.

Constipation may happen when you get less exercise, or when you eat and drink less than usual. Constipation can cause pain and discomfort. It is important to keep your bowel routine regular so that your bowel movements are easy to pass.

What can I do to help reduce constipation?

- ❖ Drink at least 2 litres (about 8 glasses) of liquid, such as water or juice each day.
- ❖ Many people find a warm drink early in the morning can help get their bowels moving.
- ❖ Eat foods high in dietary fibre, such as bran, wholegrain bread and breakfast cereals, fruit and vegetables, nuts or dried fruits.
- ❖ Try to exercise daily. A short walk may be helpful.
- ❖ Try to move your bowels at the same time each day. Many people find that after breakfast is a good time to try.
- ❖ An upright position on the toilet is best. Try resting your feet on a step to raise your knees. This is the best position to open your bowels with the least effort.
- ❖ You may like to keep a record of your bowel movements.
- ❖ Tell the health care team about things that have worked in the past to prevent constipation.
- ❖ Contact a dietician to discuss what foods help prevent constipation.
- ❖ If you are prone to constipation, you may be prescribed laxatives. Only use laxatives as prescribed by your doctor.
- ❖ Talking with your doctor and nurses will help you to get the balance right.

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Constipation can also be a side-effect of some pain-relieving medications. In these cases, eating extra dietary fibre doesn't always help; instead it can make you feel over-full and uncomfortable. If you have codeine or morphine, you will probably also have medications to help your bowel function. Discuss this with your health care team.

Contact your Doctor or Nurse or Pharmacist if
you have any questions regarding your medication

Contact your Doctor or Nurse if
you have not had your bowels open for more than 48 hours if this is not normal for you

Contact your GP/Oncologist Rooms/Emergency Department if
you have increasing pain/not passing wind or feeling concerned.

Be ready to tell them:

- When you last had a bowel movement;
- The amount and kind of food and fluid you are eating and drinking;
- The names and amounts of medication you are taking for your bowels;
- If there have been any changes in your health;
- If you have started any new medications or treatments since your last visit;
- What you are doing to manage your bowels on your own.

If your pain medication increases, ask your nurse or doctor whether other changes are also needed to help keep your bowel movements regular.

We encourage you to talk to your healthcare team if you have any concerns about constipation during your treatment.

We welcome feedback at:

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Bairnsdale Regional Health Service is located on the traditional land of the Gunai Kurnai people.

My team is **BRHS**