Managing Your Constipation

This handout will give you information on what to do if you have constipation. Your nurse may give you other information on the medication prescribed for your constipation.

What is constipation?

- Your bowel movements (passing of stool) are not regular.
- You have a hard time passing your stool (bowel movement). It may be painful to pass your stool.
- When you have a bowel movement, your stool is hard and lumpy.

Your bowels do not need to move every day. Having a bowel movement every two days can be enough. It depends on what is normal for you. Your stools should be soft and easy for you to pass.

Your constipation may be caused by:

- Your cancer or another disease you may have
- Your systemic therapy treatments
- Your medications
- Changes in your diet
- A decrease in your activity or exercise

Your constipation may have more than one cause.

The doctor will prescribe a laxative for you that will help you to have a bowel movement. It is important that you take these medications as they have been prescribed for you. If you have any questions about these medications, talk to your doctor or nurse.

What you can do if you are constipated

- Take the medications the doctor has prescribed for you. You may need to take these medications at regular times.
- It is important to drink fluids. Drink 1500-2000ml (6-8 cups) of fluid every 24 hours.
- Drink less of fluids that have caffeine or alcohol in them.
- Eat 7-10 servings of fruits and vegetable every day. Eat 6-8 servings of grain products every day. Choose whole grain breads and high fibre cereals.
- Plan to have a bowel movement 30-60 minutes after you eat a meal. Sitting on the toilet with your feet on a stool may help.
- It is important to exercise. If you are able to, go walking 3-5 times a week (15-20 minutes 2 times a day or 30-60 minutes each day).
If you have any questions or concerns about your appetite or diet, please ask any member of your healthcare team to refer you to a dietitian.

**Call your nurse at the Cancer Centre if:**

- Your stool is hard and lumpy and not easy to pass.
- You are not able to have a bowel movement.
- You have been constipated and you start to have loose, watery stools.
- You have cramping, bloating and pain in your abdomen.

Please talk to any member of your healthcare team if you have questions or if you do not understand any of the information in this handout. Your nurse will have given you a card with the number for you to call between the hours of 8:30am and 4:00pm from Monday to Friday. The Cancer Centre is closed on weekends and holidays. After these hours, go to the Emergency Department at the hospital closest to you.

For more information about how you can manage your symptoms, go to Cancer Care Ontario’s website found at: [www.cancercare.on.ca/symptoms](http://www.cancercare.on.ca/symptoms).

References:

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