

SUGGESTIONS FOR DEALING WITH CONSTIPATION

Being constipated is uncomfortable and can make you feel unwell. The guidelines in this handout can help you keep bowel movements soft and regular.

It is not necessary to have a bowel movement every day. As long as your stools are soft and easy to pass, it is okay to have a movement every 2 or 3 days. If you have not had a movement within the last 3 days, please contact your doctor or nurse before using this handout.

If you have just started morphine-type pain medications, you will need to start with Step 1 of Medications For Constipation on page 2

FOOD CHOICES

Drink eight or more cups of liquid each day. Your body needs liquids to help to keep stools soft. Water, juice, soup and soft drinks are good choices. Limit coffee, tea and alcohol, because they cause water loss.

If your appetite is smaller than usual, include nutritious liquids such as:

Milkshakes	Hot chocolate
Milk	OVALTINE®
Cream soup	Soy milk
Fruit juice	Nutritional supplement drinks

Choose foods that are natural laxatives such as prunes, prune juice, papayas and rhubarb. These should be taken every day to work their best. The recipe below makes a pleasant-tasting, natural laxative.

FRUIT LAX		
125 ml	pitted dates	(1/2 cup)
310 ml	prune nectar	(1 1/4 cups)
125 ml	figs	(1/2 cup)
200 ml	raisins	(3/4 cup)
125 ml	pitted prunes	(1/2 cup)

Simmer dates and prune nectar until dates are very soft. Put date mixture in a blender and add figs, raisins and prunes. Blend to a smooth paste. Store in the refrigerator. Use on toast, crackers, ice cream etc.

Eat foods that contain fiber such as vegetables, fruit, cereals and whole grain breads. Eating these foods will help to keep stools soft.

Have meals and snacks at the same time everyday. This may help to make bowel movements regular.

Do some light exercise, such as a short walk, after each meal.

MEDICATIONS FOR CONSTIPATION

If you are still constipated after following the suggestions on the previous page, or if you have just started taking morphine-type medications, you will need to take laxatives. Laxatives need to be taken *daily* in order to be *most effective*. The goal is to prevent constipation.

STEP ONE: Use a Laxative

Laxatives work by increasing the movement in your bowel. Here is a daily plan for taking them:

Bedtime: Take 2 laxatives

The name of the recommended laxative is **sennosides**. Familiar brand names include:

GLYSENNID®
SENOKOT®
SENOKOT® syrup (2 tsp (10 ml) = 2 laxative tablets)

Please ask your pharmacist to help you choose the brand that is right for you.

If you have diarrhea, stop taking laxatives until you have a normal bowel movement and then restart at lower step.

If you have severe cramps after taking laxatives, stop taking them and consult your health care team.

STEP TWO: Increase the Laxative

If you do not have a bowel movement for 2 days after starting laxatives, increase the number of laxatives as below:

Breakfast: Take 2 laxatives
Bedtime: Take 2 laxatives

STEP THREE: Further Increase the Laxative

If you do not have a bowel movement after 1 more day, you can add 2 more tablets of laxatives at lunchtime:

Breakfast: Take 2 laxatives
Lunch: Take 2 laxatives
Bedtime: Take 2 laxatives

STEP FOUR: Further Increase the Laxatives

If you do not have a bowel movement after 1 more day, you can increase the number of laxatives to 9 tablets per day, or 3 at each meal:

Breakfast: Take 3 laxatives
Lunch: Take 3 laxatives
Bedtime: Take 3 laxatives

STEP FIVE: Add a Suppository

If you are still constipated after using laxatives for another 1 day, add a **bisacodyl** (DULCOLAX®) suppository. You should keep the suppository in place for at least 15 minutes.

Do not use suppositories if you have low white blood cells (which fight infection) or low platelets (which help the blood to clot). Check with your oncologist if you are not sure about this.

If you are still constipated after following these 5 steps, please consult your care team nurse for more advice. They may advise you to add a liquid laxative called lactulose.

SOME IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

- Do not use liquid laxatives that contain **mineral oil** or **magnesium** such as MAGNOLAX®, AGAROL®, or MILK OF MAGNESIA® without talking to your doctor or pharmacist first. These laxatives may not be safe for long term use.
- If you are thinking about using a **bulk-forming laxative** such as METAMUCIL® or PRODIEM®, check with your doctor or nurse first. These laxatives will make bowel movements very hard if you do not drink enough fluids.
- The medications discussed here are not habit-forming. They need to be *taken regularly* in order to be *most effective*.
- The doses of medications discussed here are higher than the directions given on the product labels. Please follow the directions given in this information sheet because higher doses are often needed, especially if you are taking morphine-type medications. *These higher doses are safe.*
- If you are eating less than usual, you may notice that your stools become smaller – this is perfectly normal. Even if you are not eating at all, you still need to have regular bowel movements. As a rule of thumb, *if 3 or more days pass without a bowel movement, please contact your doctor or nurse.*
- Docusate may be a useful stool softener to take in addition to sennosides if you have hard stools and cramps with the sennosides alone. Docusate sodium is also known as “COLACE®” or other generic brand. You can take 2 capsules with each meal, up to 6 per day.
- A glycerin adult suppository will help lubricate the stool if it is hard and uncomfortable to pass.

BC Cancer Agency OUTPATIENT BOWEL PROTOCOL SUMMARY

Where to start:

- Begin at STEP 1 unless you are switching from a different laxative treatment.
- If you are switching from a different laxative treatment, check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for the most appropriate starting level.

How to adjust:

- If you do not have a bowel movement after 2 days on STEP 1, go to the next step.
- Thereafter, if you do not have a bowel movement after 1 day at a step, go to the next step.
- If you are able to have a bowel movement which is soft and comfortable to pass at least every 2 to 3 days at a step, stay at the same step.

Cautions:

- If you have diarrhea, stop taking laxatives until you have a normal bowel movement and then restart at lower step.
- If you have severe cramps, stop taking sennosides and call your doctor or nurse.
- If 3 or more days pass without a bowel movement, please contact your doctor or nurse.
- Do not use suppositories if you have low white blood cells (which fight infection) or low platelets (which help the blood to clot). Check with your oncologist if you are not sure about this.

Step	Breakfast	Lunch	Bedtime
1			2 x Sennosides
2	2 x Sennosides		2 x Sennosides
3	2 x Sennosides	2 x Sennosides	2 x Sennosides
4	3 x Sennosides	3 x Sennosides	3 x Sennosides
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue Step 4. ▪ Unwrap and insert an adult bisacodyl suppository into your rectum. (Do not use suppositories if you have low white blood cells (which fight infection) or low platelets (which help the blood to clot). Check with your oncologist if you are not sure about this.) ▪ Keep suppository in place for at least 15 minutes. ▪ If still no bowel movement after 1 hour, call your doctor or nurse or pharmacist. ▪ Lactulose 15 to 30 ml twice a day may be added 		

What to buy at the drugstore:

- Sennosides 8.6 mg tablets also known as "SENOKOT®" or other generic brand
- Bisacodyl 10 mg suppositories also known as "DULCOLAX®" or other generic brand
- Lactulose syrup

Notes:

- Docusate may be a useful stool softener to take in addition to sennosides if you have hard stools and cramps with the sennosides alone. Docusate sodium is also known as "COLACE®" or other generic brand. You can take 2 capsules with each meal, up to 6 per day.
- A glycerin adult suppository will help lubricate the stool if it is hard and uncomfortable to pass.