

## **Constipation**

As long as your stools are soft and easy to pass, it is okay to only have a movement every 2 or even 3 days.

If you have not had a movement within the last 3 days it is important to contact your doctor or nurse before reading any further.

If you have just started morphine-type pain medications, you will need to start with Step 1 of Medications for Constipation below

### **Preventing Constipation**

Being constipated is uncomfortable and can make you feel unwell so it is important to be proactive in managing your stools.

- Drink at least 8 cups of liquid each day 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.
- Eat foods that contain fibre 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**

Laxatives need to be taken *daily* in order to be *most effective*. The goal is to prevent constipation.

Laxatives work by increasing the movement in your bowel.

## **Step 1:**

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)

Your physician or pharmacist will help you choose the one that is right for you.

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

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

If you do not have a bowel movement for 2 days after starting laxatives proceed to step 2

## **STEP 2: Increase the Laxative**

Breakfast: Take 2 laxatives

Bedtime: Take 2 laxatives

### **STEP 3: Further increase in laxatives**

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 4: Further increase**

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 5: 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 or physician 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