
Constipation Management During Cancer Treatment

Constipation can be a common side effect during cancer treatment. In general, constipation is defined as three or more days without a bowel movement. It could also mean having bowel movements less often than is normal for you or having to push harder than usual. Below are some recommendations to maintain regular bowel movements.

What to do to help manage your constipation:

- Try to take in 8 to 10 cups of liquid each day. It is important to drink even if you are not thirsty. Drink water, prune juice, apple juice, de-caffeinated teas and water with lemon juice and honey. Warm beverages may be especially helpful. Add foods that contain fluids, such as soup, gelatin, and popsicles.
- If you are at risk for or have constipation, establish a regimen to stay regular. This may include a fiber supplement, such as Metamucil (psyllium fiber).
- Consume an adequate amount of dietary fiber. The daily recommendation is 25 grams for women and 38 grams for men. It is important to increase fiber slowly.
- Certain pain medication can cause constipation. Talk to your provider if you are taking pain medication and are experiencing constipation.

Tips for adding fiber into your diet:

- Select cereal with at least 5 grams of fiber per serving. Choose whole grain breads, brown rice, or whole wheat pasta. Add oat bran or wheat bran to baked goods or pancakes. Add wheat germ to yogurt or hot cereal.
- Enjoy a banana, a pear, or an apple as a snack between meals. Add fruit to cereal, salads, yogurt, or cottage cheese. Use avocado as topping for eggs, entrees, or salad.
- Add fresh or frozen vegetables to casseroles, stir-fries, or stews. Add lettuce and spinach to sandwiches. Enjoy fresh vegetables with hummus as a snack.
- Beans can be used in place of animal protein. Add beans to soups, stews, and salads.
- Add nuts and seeds, such as flaxseed, to breakfast cereal, yogurt, salads, or desserts. Choose nuts as a fiber-rich snack.

What to do to help manage gas and bloating:

- Constipation may increase abdominal gas/bloating. To manage this:
 - Limit drinks and foods that cause gas, such as carbonated beverages, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumbers, dried beans, dried peas, and onions. Abdominal gas should disappear when bowel function returns to normal.
 - Swallowing air can cause abdominal gas.
 - To swallow less air: Drink without a straw, avoid chewing gum, and don't talk while eating.
- Try to be active every day. Consider low-impact exercises for 15-30 minutes to increase gut motility. Talk with your doctor or physical therapist to learn more about exercises that can help you.
- Keep a journal of how often you are moving your bowels. Document consistency of the stool (hard, medium, soft), what bowel medication you are taking, and how much bowel medication you are taking daily. This will help your provider adjust your medications if needed.
- Use laxatives only on the advice of your physician. If you are on opioid pain management a different regimen may be recommended – contact your clinic.
- Talk with your healthcare team if problems continue. There are a variety of products available that can help to prevent and manage constipation.