

Constipation

What it is

Constipation is when bowel movements happen less often and stools are hard, dry and not easy to pass. You may also feel bloated or sick to your stomach (nauseated), belch, pass a lot of gas, and have stomach cramps, pain or pressure in the rectum.

Why it happens

Some common causes of constipation are:

- Pain meds, anti-nausea meds and some cancer treatment medicines
- The location of the cancer
- Not being as active or spending a lot of time sitting or lying down
- Changes in your diet such as not eating enough or not drinking enough fluids

Ways to manage constipation

- **If you have a remedy for constipation that's worked before, ask your cancer doctor or nurse if it's okay to use it.** Sometimes they may want you to avoid certain medicines, foods or home remedies for constipation. Never use enemas or suppositories unless your doctor or nurse tells you to do so.
- **Try being active each day.** This can help prevent and relieve constipation. You can be active by walking or doing yoga. If you can't walk, ask what exercises you can do in a chair or bed. Ask your doctor if you need to limit your activity in any way.
- **Drink at least 8 cups of fluids each day unless someone on your health care team tells you not to.** Drink often throughout the day. Drinking warm or hot fluids, such as coffee and tea helps with constipation. Fruit juices, such as prune juice, may also help.
- **Ask your doctor or nurse if you can eat foods high in fiber or use a fiber supplement.** Foods high in fiber and fiber supplements **can harm** people with certain types of cancer or those not drinking enough fluids. Check with your doctor or nurse before adding high fiber foods or a fiber supplement to your diet. High fiber foods include veggies, fruits with skin, whole grain products, popcorn, dried fruits and nuts.



- **If you need help finding a constipation remedy, talk with your cancer doctor, nurse or dietitian.** Ask if there's a laxative, stool softener or other medicine you can take. You may also want to ask if you should take something to help prevent constipation. Doing so may help you keep your normal bowel pattern. It's best to ask **before** starting treatment, if you take pain or anti-nausea medicine or if you've had past problems with constipation.

Call your doctor or nurse right away if you:

- Have not had a bowel movement in 2 days
- Have not had a bowel movement within 24 hours after using a home remedy
- Have belly pain, bloating, cramping, and/or rectal pain
- Have an upset stomach (nausea) and/or are throwing up (vomiting)
- See blood in your bowel movements
- Are not passing gas
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher or chills



Constipation is sometimes a sign of a more severe health problem. Call your doctor or nurse right away if you have any concerns.

Go to the nearest Emergency Room or call 911 right away if you have:

- Bleeding from your rectum (bottom)
- Bowel movements with a lot of blood or blood clots
- Bowel movements that are black or tar-like
- Severe belly pain or swelling
- Vomit that is brown, yellow, green, bitter tasting or looks like coffee grounds



This info is a general resource. It is not meant to replace your doctor's advice. Ask your doctor or health care team any questions. Always follow their instructions.