

Marion L. Shepard Cancer Center
(252) 975-4308

Constipation

Did you know?

- Constipation is difficulty passing stools or a decrease in the normal frequency of your bowel movements.
- It can be a side effect of some chemotherapy, anti-nausea and pain medicines, lack of physical activity, reduced fluid intake, and /or poor nutrition.

What to eat and drink:

- Drink plenty of water and other liquids. Aim for 8-10 large glasses of caffeine-free fluid each day. Dehydration will worsen constipation.
- Include foods that contain liquids, such as watermelon, grapes, soups, popsicles, etc.
- Eat a good breakfast at the same time every day and include warm food and drinks, such as oatmeal and tea.
- Add dried fruit, such as apricots, raisins, dried plums (prunes), and dates to your diet.
- Eat more raw fruits and vegetables, beans and peas, nuts and seeds, and whole grain food items. Slowly add these high-fiber foods and drink plenty of fluid to aid digestion.
- Add 1-2 tablespoons of ground flaxseed to your cereal, oatmeal, or low-fat yogurt.

*What **not** to eat and drink:*

- Avoid chocolate and other foods high in sugar and low in fiber.
- Avoid eggs and high-fat dairy items, such as milk, ice cream, and cheese.
- It is important to eat plenty of fiber; however, if gas is a problem you may need to avoid certain gas-producing food, such as beans, cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, corn, peas, cucumbers, peppers, melons, apricots, prunes and raw apples.

How to treat?

- Take Senekot S (over-the-counter medicine at pharmacy). You can take up to 4 per day. Start with 1-2 at bedtime then add 1-2 in the morning if needed. These can be adjusted to give you the most benefit.
- Do not use suppositories or enemas unless ordered by the doctor. You are at higher risk of infection and bleeding when on chemotherapy so anything rectally should be avoided.

When to call the nurse:

- Call the nurse if you have not had a bowel movement in 3 days and you are following the instructions above.
- Call the nurse if you start experiencing nausea and vomiting as well as constipation.