

Constipation/Diarrhea

Chapters Health System Resource Library Series

IMPORTANT!

How the care team can help:

Patients given pain medications (mainly opioids) are put on a constipation regimen to combat the number-one side effect of pain medications. The nursing team also communicates openly with the patient, family and physician to determine if a bowel regimen is needed or needs to be intensified.

Treatment:

- Low intestinal solids from lack of food is treated with psyllium (similar to fiber).
- Low water in stool is usually treated with medications that can draw in fluids.
- Low intestinal movement, usually due to pain medications, is treated with bowel stimulating medicine or even prune juice.

**If you have questions or concerns,
please call 866.204.8611.**



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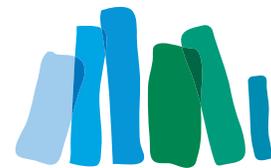
What is bowel management?

A program of bowel management helps to control uncomfortable or unhealthy stool evacuation. Care team members work with the patient and family to bring relief.

At the end of life, patients often need help with personal issues such as bowel care. Constipated patients have difficulty in emptying their bowels. The opposite condition is diarrhea, which is characterized by loose, watery stools or a frequent need to have a bowel movement.

Constipation is one of the most common problems experienced by hospice patients. It can cause extreme suffering and discomfort to those who often have multiple healthcare needs. It can also influence patients' daily lives to such an extent that they become totally preoccupied by their bowels.

A primary side effect of opioid pain medication is constipation. In an attempt to control it, patients may refuse their pain medications. Constipation and diarrhea can both be distressing and deeply embarrassing for hospice patients, and they are often reluctant to discuss these issues. Some patients may find it difficult to express their discomfort. Often they use the phrase "I'm not feeling right," because the bowel issue may mimic and enhance the general physical weakness associated with progressive disease.



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