

# Constipation

## *Chapters Health System Resource Library Series*

### What is Constipation?

Constipation is the passage of hard, dry stools less often than the person's usual bowel pattern. Opioids slow the bowel movement (BM) so laxatives should be started as soon as these medications are prescribed. More important than having BMs frequently is experiencing no discomfort. Anyone taking an opioid should have a BM, at a minimum, every two to three days. Please record your BMs and share with your Chapters Health System team at every visit.

### Signs of constipation:

- Less frequent BMs, dry hard stools, straining during bowel movement.
- Incomplete passage of stool.
- Bloating and swelling of the abdomen.
- Cramping, nausea, vomiting, reflux and/or heartburn.

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



### Report the following to the Chapters Health Team:

- Change in the frequency of BMs.
- Change in stool consistency.
- Urge but inability to pass stool; rectal fullness or pressure.
- Change in the amount of gas passed rectally.
- Constipation may worsen if you are not drinking enough liquids. If you are not able to drink enough fluids talk to your hospice team.
- Tell your team if you are taking any over-the-counter medications or if there have been any medication changes made since the last visit. There are medications that can make constipation worse.
- Abdominal symptoms: bloating and/or swelling, distention, cramping, gas, nausea, vomiting, reflux and/or heartburn.
- Problems with passing stool, straining, incomplete passage of stool or diarrhea, hemorrhoidal pain or bleeding.

### What Can be Done for Constipation?

- Stool softeners and laxatives should be prescribed at the same time as the pain medication.
- Drink eight glasses of fluid per day, if able.
- Include natural fiber from fruits and vegetables in your diet.
- Drink warm fluids with or after meals to stimulate the bowel.
- Light exercise as tolerated. Walk or sit upright after meals; this will help with digestion.
- “Train” your bowels by sitting on the toilet at the same time daily.
- Do not fight the urge to have a BM.



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