



# Constipation In People with Cancer

---

Constipation is having bowel movements that come less often than normal for you, are painful, or are hard to pass. There are many causes for constipation in people with cancer including:

- Medications, such as
  - Pain medications (especially opioids, narcotic pain relievers)
  - Anti-Nausea medications
  - Medications for treating depression (antidepressants) and/or anxiety
  - Sleep (insomnia) medications
- Cancer treatments (certain types of chemotherapy, radiation, and/or surgery)
- Being less physically active
- Not drinking enough fluids

## **What can I do to prevent constipation?**

The following tips may help:

- Drink more fluid. Aim to drink 8-10 glasses of water per day.
- Drink warm fluids 30 minutes before the time you usually have a bowel movement.
- Increase the amount of fiber in your diet. Fiber is found in foods such as fruit, vegetables, and whole grains. One way to add fiber to your diet is with the following recipe:
  - Combine 1 cup of apple sauce, 1 cup of All Bran, and 1 cup of prune juice.

- Take 2-3 tablespoons daily and refrigerate excess. Adjust amount you take to regulate your bowel movements with the goal to have one bowel movement every 24 hours.

**Special Instructions for people taking an opioid (narcotic) pain medicine:**

Take 2-6 tablets of Senokot-S® every day while you are taking opioids. Adjust (add or reduce) the number of pills to regulate your bowel movements with the goal to have one bowel movement every 24 hours.

If you have not had a bowel movement **over the last 24 hours**, do the following:

- Increase the number of Senokot-S® tablets you take, but do not take more than 6 Senokot-S® tablets per day.
- Start taking MiraLax® once a day. Dissolve 1 capful of MiraLax® in 1 glass of water and drink the solution. Do not take more than one dose per day.

If you have not had a bowel movement **for 2 days**, do the following:

- Take 3 Senokot-S® tablets twice a day (total of 6 tablets per day).
- Continue to take MiraLax® (1 capful in 1 glass of water) once a day.
- Take 2 tablespoons of Milk of Magnesia® once a day.

If you have not had a bowel movement **for 3 days**, do the following:

- Continue to take 3 Senokot-S® tablets twice a day (total of 6 tablets per day).
- Continue to take MiraLax® (1 capful in 1 glass of water) once a day.
- Continue to take 2 tablespoons of Milk of Magnesia® once a day.
- Drink half of a bottle of Magnesium Citrate (8 ounces) and drink the second half of the bottle 6 hours later if you still have not had a bowel movement.

## When should I call the doctor?

Call you doctor if you:

- Have not had a bowel movement in 4 or more days
- Notice blood in your stool
- Develop new nausea or vomiting

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Author: Paul Swiecicki, MD

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#). Doc.# 1915 Last Revised: 2/2017