

Constipation Management



Everyday Management of Constipation with “Gush, Push, Mush”

Osmotic Laxative (“Gush”):

Osmotic laxatives soften stool. Use **one** of the following:

- ▶ **Polyethylene glycol (MiraLax®):** 1 scoop or capful (17 grams) in juice daily. May increase to twice daily. Take regularly. Available over-the-counter.
- ▶ **Lactulose:** 30 cc/mL (2 tablespoons) one to four times daily.

Stimulant (“Push”):

Acts as a “whip” on the bowel to get it moving and should be taken regularly. Please note that stimulants can cause cramping. Bisacodyl is a stronger stimulant.

Use **one** of the following:

- ▶ **Senna 8.6 mg:** 1 to 2 tablets at bedtime. May increase to 2-3 tablets, twice daily.
- ▶ **Senna-S 8.6mg/50mg:** Senna + docusate 50mg. Same directions as above.
- ▶ **Senna Tea:** Smooth Move® or other brands. 1 cup of tea, twice daily.
- ▶ **Bisacodyl (Dulcolax®) 5 mg:** 1-2 tablets at bedtime. May increase to 2-3 tablets, twice daily.

Stool softener (“Mush”):

For stools that are hard or like rabbit pellets.

Use **one** of the following:

- ▶ **Docusate:** 100 mg or 250 mg capsules. Take 100-250 mg once or twice a day, may increase to 500 mg twice daily.
- ▶ **Senna-S 8.6 mg/50 mg:** Senna + docusate 50 mg. Same directions as above.

Natural remedies

- ▶ **Prunes:** 6 prunes per day, or 6 ounces of prune juice, twice daily.
- ▶ **Yakima Fruit Paste:** See recipe on other side. Take 1-2 tablespoons, twice daily.

Notes about constipation

- ▶ Opioid (narcotic) pain medicines and other medications will make you constipated.
- ▶ A regular bowel management plan is needed to prevent constipation.
- ▶ The “Gush + Push” plan works well, with most items available over-the-counter.
- ▶ Most patients need to take at least two bowel medicines: an osmotic laxative + stimulant (Gush + Push); or a stool softener + a stimulant (Mush + Push) for control.
- ▶ It is important to take these medicines regularly.
- ▶ The goal is a soft, formed stool that is easy to pass without straining, every 1-2 days.
- ▶ **For severe constipation not relieved with above, please contact us as soon as possible.**

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For more information, call 352.265.0725. After hours, call 352.265.0111 or visit UFHealth.org/palliativecare.

Prevention of Constipation

In the setting of advanced cancer, many things work against proper bowel function. This includes medications, lack of exercise, dehydration, abnormal lab tests, large tumors in the abdomen, ascites or carcinomatosis. Carcinomatosis' are small beads of cancer adhering to the wall of the bowel, making passage of stool more difficult. Even if you are eating very little, you should have small bowel movements regularly.

If you are able to, try some of these measures to help with constipation:

- ▶ **Exercise:** Try to walk for 5-15 minutes once or twice a day. Exercise helps the bowels to start moving. Even slow walking will help.
- ▶ **Fluids:** Dehydration worsens constipation, while regular fluid intake helps the bowels to move. Try to drink at least 2 liters of fluid each day, if possible.
- ▶ **Prunes or prune juice:** 6 prunes or 6 ounces of prune juice daily works wonders.

Please note: Fiber supplements, such as Metamucil® or Citrucel®, are typically not recommended in advanced cancer, as it may worsen constipation if you cannot get enough fluid intake. Please ask your physician for more information.

Treatment of Severe Constipation

For severe constipation that is not managed by the everyday treatments provided for you on this list, try some of the measures below. However, it is important to note that at times, severe constipation is caused by a partial or total bowel obstruction (stoppage). **Please call the urgent care contact numbers provided should you have any concerns.**

- ▶ **Milk of Magnesia:** 1-2 tablespoons, 2-4 times a day. Do not take for more than two days without calling for further instructions. Available over-the-counter.
- ▶ **Magnesium citrate:** Take ½ to 1 bottle. Repeat if no bowel movements within 12 hours. Do not take more than two bottles.

Rectal administration may not be advised for those on chemotherapy, with a low neutrophil count or low platelets.

Check with your oncologist, nurse practitioner, physician assistant or oncologist's nurse before using one of the following:

- ▶ **Bisacodyl (Dulcolax®) 10mg suppository:** Use one in the rectum each night. Do not take with Senna tablets or bisacodyl tablets as this causes cramping.
- ▶ **Fleets® Enema:** Follow the package insert instructions. This may be repeated once. Do not take more than two enemas without calling for further instructions. Available over-the-counter, however, avoid "high colonic" enemas.
- ▶ **Methylnaltrexone (Relistor®) shots** are an additional treatment option. **This is a prescription only, for use in moderate to severe constipation from opioids (narcotics).** A shot is given every 24-48 hours for severe constipation.

NOTE: CALL YOUR NURSE IF SEVERE CONSTIPATION DOES NOT IMPROVE IN 24-48 HOURS, IF YOU HAVE SEVERE ABDOMINAL PAIN, FEEL TERRIBLE OR YOU ARE GETTING WORSE.

Yakima Fruit Paste Recipe

- ▶ 2 cups Senna tea using Smooth Move® tea bags or loose Senna leaves and strain
- ▶ 1 pound each of prunes, raisins and figs
- ▶ 1 cup brown sugar, or use a sugar substitute
- ▶ 1 cup lemon juice

Prepare the tea in a large pot. Add prunes, raisins and figs. Boil tea and fruit for 5 minutes. Remove from heat, add sugar and lemon juice. Allow to cool. Using a hand mixer or food processor, blend into a smooth paste. Place in a plastic container and put into the freezer. The paste will be the consistency of peanut butter when it is frozen. Spoon out and eat 1-2 tablespoons, twice a day. It is great right off the spoon, spread on toast or added to hot water.

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