

# CONSTIPATION & DIARRRHEA

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Track your side effects and talk them over with your treatment team
- Don't be embarrassed to talk openly with your treatment team
- There is no one-size fits all; find ways to manage that work for you
- Prevention is key! Many of these effects can be anticipated and should be treated before or soon after they occur

## Constipation

### WHAT IS IT?

If you are constipated, you may strain on the toilet, have hardened stools and feel like there is a blockage in your bowels. If you have fewer than three bowel movements a week, you are likely to be constipated.

Constipation can cause pain and discomfort. You may not feel like yourself and not want to do much socially. It can also result in decreased appetite and weight loss as well as nausea and vomiting.

### COMMON CAUSES

- Opioid pain medications
- Certain types of chemotherapy
- Anesthesia during surgery
- Some anti-depressants and anti-nausea medications
- High levels of calcium
- Dehydration
- Lack of physical activity

### MEDICAL TREATMENT

Experts agree it is best to start with a mild, over-the-counter stool softener like senna (Senokot®) or docusate sodium (Colace ®).

If you need more help, your doctor can suggest other medications that are best for your situation.

### TIPS TO TRY

- Drink plenty of fluids (avoid caffeine and carbonation)
- Stay as active as possible
- Eat high fiber foods, like fresh fruit and vegetables
- Take fiber supplements, like psyllium (Metamucil®) or dextrin (Benefiber®), with lots of fluids
- Have hot beverages with breakfast (warm up juice, decaffeinated coffee or tea)



# Diarrhea

## WHAT IS IT?

Diarrhea is frequent, loose and watery bowel movements.

## COMMON CAUSES

- Treatment, such as radiation to the lower abdomen
- Certain chemotherapies and immunotherapies
- Stopping opioid pain medications
- Infection
- Diet that is too high in fiber

## MEDICAL TREATMENT

- Diphenoxylate - atropine sulfate (Lomotil®)
- Loperamide (Imodium®)

## IF LEFT UNTREATED

- Dehydration and weakness
- Oral medications may not be absorbed properly
- Poor nutrition and weight loss
- Injury to the kidneys
- Delay of treatment or reduction of doses

## AVOID...

- Greasy, fatty or fried foods.
- Raw vegetables or fruits.
- Gassy foods like beans or cabbage
- Foods or supplements that contain lactose
- Caffeine, milk products and carbonation
- Alcohol

## TIPS TO TRY

- Drink plenty of clear fluids
- Eat low fiber foods; a bland diet, like BRAT (bananas, rice, applesauce, toast)
- Try bulking agents such as psyllium or methylcellulose (Citrucel®)
- Ask your doctor about herbal supplements
- Protect irritated skin around the anus with zinc oxide or a cortisone cream

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