Constipation in Adults

Constipation is having fewer than 2 bowel movements per week. Usually, the stools are hard. As we grow older, constipation is more common. If you try to fix constipation with laxatives, the problem may get worse. This is because laxatives taken over a long period of time make the colon muscles weaker. A low-fiber diet, not taking in enough fluids, and taking some medicines may make these problems worse.

MEDICATIONS THAT MAY CAUSE CONSTIPATION

- Water pills (*diuretics*).
- Calcium channel blockers (used to control blood pressure and for the heart).
- Certain pain medicines (*narcotics*).
- Anticholinergics.
- Anti-inflammatory agents.
- Antacids that contain aluminum.

DISEASES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CONSTIPATION

- Diabetes.
- Parkinson's disease.
- Dementia.
- Stroke.
- Depression.
- Illnesses that cause problems with salt and water metabolism.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Constipation is usually best cared for without medicines. Increasing dietary fiber and eating more fruits and vegetables is the best way to manage constipation.
  - Slowly increase fiber intake to 25 to 38 grams per day. Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes are good sources of fiber. A dietitian can further help you incorporate high-fiber foods into your diet.
  - Drink enough water and fluids to keep your urine clear or pale yellow.
- A fiber supplement may be added to your diet if you cannot get enough fiber from foods.
- Increasing your activities also helps improve regularity.
- Suppositories, as suggested by your caregiver, will also help. If you are using antacids, such as aluminum or calcium containing products, it will be helpful to switch to products containing magnesium if your caregiver says it is okay.
- If you have been given a liquid injection (*enema*) today, this is only a temporary measure. It should not be relied on for treatment of longstanding (*chronic*) constipation.
- Stronger measures, such as magnesium sulfate, should be avoided if possible. This may cause uncontrollable diarrhea. Using magnesium sulfate may not allow you time to make it to the bathroom.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- There is bright red blood in the stool.
- The constipation stays for more than 4 days.
- There is belly (*abdominal*) or rectal pain.
- You do not seem to be getting better.
- You have any questions or concerns.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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