Constipation

Constipation has many causes. These include:

- Poor diet.
- Inactivity.
- Dehydration.
- Water pills (*diuretics*).
- Diabetes.
- Emotional distress.
- Some medicines (especially narcotics).
- Diseases and tumors of the bowels.
- Antacids that contain aluminum.
- Strokes.
- Parkinson's disease.

You do not require further treatment today. You may need further evaluation to find the cause of your problem.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- 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/day. Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes are good sources of fiber. A registered dietitian can further help you incorporate high fiber foods into your diet.
  - Drink at least 8 cups of fluid daily when eating high fiber foods to prevent further constipation.
- **Other measures include:**
  - Increasing your oral fluid intake (10 to 12 glasses of water every day).
  - Getting regular physical exercise.
  - Using the toilet when the urge occurs - do not wait.
  - Suppositories, as suggested by your caregiver, will help stimulate the colon to empty.
  - Do not 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.
  - If you have been given an enema today, this is only a temporary measure. It should not be relied on for treatment of longstanding (*chronic*) constipation. If enemas are used long term, they will weaken the colon muscles as well.
  - 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 YOU DEVELOP:

- Increased or severe belly (*abdominal*) or back pain.
- Repeated vomiting or dehydration.
- Blood in your stool, fever, chills, or fainting.
- Bright red blood in the stool.

MAKE SURE YOU:

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

Document Released: 12/18/2006 Document Re-Released: 03/14/2011
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