**Constipation and Opioid (Pain Medicine) Use**

Constipation is when you are not able to have a bowel movement (BM) for several days or have stools that are hard or difficult to pass without straining. Constipation is a common problem and the reason many people are admitted to the hospital. Even if you are not eating, you still need to have a bowel movement at least every other day.

Taking opioids (pain medicine) will make you constipated. This problem will not go away as long as you are taking opioids. Here are some things you can do to decrease constipation that is caused by taking opioids:

- Take laxatives and/or stool softeners
- Drink plenty of water
- Stay physically active

**What can I do to avoid constipation?**

- **Drink fluids**
  
  Drink at least 2 quarts or 8 glasses (8-ounce size) of clear fluids each day. However, if you have been told to limit fluids, check with your doctor about how much you can drink.

- **Physical Activity**
  
  Be sure to do some walking if you are able. Check with your doctor before starting any new exercises.

- **Use Laxatives and Stool Softeners**
  
  You may need to take medicine every day, while you are on opioids, to control your constipation. See the following guide for how to use stool softeners and laxatives. Check with your doctor for other ways to control constipation.

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This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Medicine</th>
<th>Directions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>You should start taking these medicines the same day you start taking opioids (pain medicine).</td>
<td>These medicines will help prevent constipation. Take them every day that you take opioids. If your bowels become loose, you may need to take fewer pills.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senna 8.6 mg tablets</td>
<td>Take 1 to 2 tablets, two times a day.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Docusate (Colace) 100 mg capsules</td>
<td>Take 1 to 4 capsules by mouth, two times a day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>If you have not had a bowel movement in 48 hours, CALL YOUR DOCTOR. Your doctor may tell you to use one of the medicines listed below.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Milk of Magnesia 400mg/5mL (not concentrate)</td>
<td>Take 2 to 4 tablespoonfuls by mouth, every 8 hours until you have a bowel movement.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Polyethylene glycol 3350 (Miralax)</td>
<td>Mix one capful (17 grams) of powder in 8 ounces of water, juice, soda, sports drink, coffee, or tea. Use Miralax every 12 hours until you have a bowel movement.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Call your doctor again if you have not had a bowel movement for 24 hours after following these steps.</td>
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When should I call my doctor?

You should call your doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Watery stools (this can be a sign of severe constipation or too much bowel medicine)
- No bowel movement in 48 hours
- Small stools
- Hard stools
- Pain with bowel movements
- Straining with bowel movements

Special Instructions:

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Names of Opioid Medicines:

- Hydrocodone (Vicodin, Norco, Lortab)
- Morphine (MSContin, MSIR)
- Oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet, OxyIR, Roxicodone)
- Hydromorphone (Dilaudid, Exalgo)
- Fentanyl (Durasgesic)
- Oxymorphone (Opana)
- Methadone