

How to prevent constipation caused by your medicines

Your health care provider prescribed a medicine for you that might cause constipation. Here are some things you should know when taking this medicine:

- Many prescribed and over-the-counter medicines can cause constipation. Taking several medicines that can cause constipation, or taking large doses of these medicines, increases your risk of becoming severely constipated.
- Constipation is the most common side effect of taking opioids regularly for pain. Once constipation starts, it rarely gets better on its own without treatment.
- You will need to do certain things, such as drinking more fluids and taking other medicines, to lower your chance of constipation and serious complications.
- A common goal for patients with constipation is to have one bowel movement every 1 to 2 days.
- Most patients who are taking opioid medicines need other medicines and treatments to make sure they don't become constipated.

Call your provider or the consulting nurse if you have any of the following:

- Blood in stools, vomiting, or cramps lasting more than 2 hours.
- You haven't had a bowel movement for 4 days or longer.
- If you have diarrhea for 24 hours after starting your constipation medicines.

After hours, call the Consulting Nurse Service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: 1-800-297-6877

Things you can do to help prevent constipation:

1. Drink eight 8-ounce glasses of fluids every day.
 - Talk with your provider if you have congestive heart failure, chronic kidney disease, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) before increasing your fluids.
2. Drink 8 ounces of warm or hot liquid about 30 minutes before your normal time for a bowel movement.
3. Move around.
 - Walk twice a day, for up to 15 to 20 minutes at a time, if you're physically able.
 - ✓ If you're not able to do this, talk to your provider about other types of activity.
4. Eat a healthy diet
 - Eat more fruits and vegetables to increase your fiber.
 - ✓ Don't increase your fiber if you can't drink the recommended fluids.
 - ✓ Don't take fiber products like Konsyl, Metamucil, Fibersure, or FiberCon. They may cause a blockage in your bowel.
 - Sugarless candy sweetened with sorbitol might be helpful for treating constipation.
 - Avoid foods and beverages that seem to make your symptoms worse.

Using medicines to prevent constipation

Most people taking opioids regularly will also need to take over-the-counter laxatives and stool softeners. Many laxatives and stool softeners are safe to use every day for constipation caused by opioid medicine.

These guidelines might not be safe if you've recently had abdominal surgery, diverticulosis, Crohn's disease (inflammatory bowel disease), hemorrhoids, or heart problems. Talk to your provider or nurse if you've had problems in the past with constipation, or if you've ever been considered for abdominal surgery.

Your goal is to have one soft bowel movement every 1 to 2 days. Having a bowel movement should not cause cramps or require straining. Schedule a time each day for doing this to establish your routine.

Don't wait until you are constipated to start taking these medicines and making changes in your regular routine. It is much easier to prevent constipation from happening than it is to treat it after it starts.

These over-the-counter medicines are available at your local pharmacy:

- **Laxatives**, such as senna (Senokot), milk of magnesia, polyethylene glycol (Miralax), and bisacodyl rectal suppository
- **Stool softeners**, such as docusate sodium (Colace)

When you start taking opioid medicine, follow the schedule below unless your provider, nurse, or pharmacist gives you different instructions:

Day 1	Take 1 docusate capsule and 2 senna tablets at bedtime.
Day 2	If you don't have a bowel movement in the morning, take 1 docusate capsule and 2 senna tablets in the morning. If you don't have a bowel movement in the evening, take 1 docusate capsule and 3 senna tablets at bedtime.
Day 3	If you don't have a bowel movement in the morning, take 2 docusate capsules, 4 senna tablets, and 30 mL of milk of magnesia in the morning. If you don't have a bowel movement in the evening, take 2 docusate capsules, 4 senna tablets, 30 mL of milk of magnesia, and insert a bisacodyl rectal suppository about an hour before bedtime.
Day 4	If you don't have a bowel movement by the morning of day 4, call your provider.

Once you reach your goal of having one bowel movement every 1 to 2 days, continue following the previous day's dose of laxatives. For example, if you have a bowel movement the morning of day 3, continue following the dosages listed for day 2. Remember, it is safe to use laxatives and stool softeners daily for constipation caused by medicine.

Follow these guidelines when treating constipation:

- If you have more than 2 bowel movements in one day, stop using suppositories and milk of magnesia. If you continue having more than 2 bowel movements a day, talk to your provider, nurse, or pharmacist.
- If you have diarrhea, frequent bowel movements, or cramps while taking these medicines, stop taking docusate and senna for 24 hours. If the diarrhea goes away, but you still need a laxative to have a bowel movement, you can take half of the previous dose you were taking of docusate and senna.
- If you don't do things to treat your constipation, it can lead to serious medical issues. Don't hesitate to call your provider, nurse or pharmacist if you have concerns about your medicines, bowel movements, or any side effects that concern you.
- Check with your provider, nurse, or pharmacist before taking any herbal, naturopathic, or homeopathic preparations for constipation to make sure there are no drug interactions or serious side effects with your opioid medicine.