

## Symptom Management

### Constipation Management

Constipation is the infrequent and or difficult passage of hard stool, which causes pain and discomfort. It is caused by too little fluid or not enough movement in the bowel. Many prescription medications can cause constipation. Bowel function is also affected by activity and diet. For example, regular doses of narcotic type, pain relieving medication frequently cause constipation. The medication regimen should also include use of a laxative to avoid constipation.

#### Signs of constipation:

- No regular Bowel Movement in 3 days.
- Small, hard bowel movements.
- Stomachache or cramps.
- Feeling of fullness, puffy belly.
- Passing excess amounts of gas.
- Leaking of watery stool when bowels have not moved regularly.

#### Ways to prevent constipation:

- If patient is able: increase diet to include high fiber foods such as, bran cereal, fresh fruits and vegetables, dates, apricots, and prunes.
- Increase fluid intake. Encourage a cup of hot liquid in the morning.
- Increase activity level as you can. Even exercises in bed are helpful.
- Have a regular time for an undisturbed visit to the bathroom. 30 minutes after a meal is suggested. Encourage the patient to never ignore the urge to have a movement. Give them a few minutes on the toilet. Instruct them to try to relax and to not strain.

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### Treatments for constipation:

- The overall goal is to have a bowel movement every 3 days.
- If at any time the dosage of pain medication is increased, the dose of laxatives may need to be increased. The nurse will help with this.
- The recommended laxative contains Senna concentrate and docusate sodium (Colace), which is a natural vegetable laxative plus a softener. The tablets generally produce a bowel movement within 6-12 hours.
- The recommended dosage:
  - 1) Take 2 laxative tablets at bedtime.
  - 2) If no BM by morning, take 2 more laxative tablets after breakfast.
  - 3) If no BM by evening, take 3 laxative tablets at bedtime.
  - 4) If no BM by the second morning, CALL the Hospice Nurse .

### Nausea and Vomiting Management

Nausea is an unpleasant sensation and vomiting is the sudden forceful expulsion of stomach contents through the mouth. These symptoms may occur due to side effects of medications (especially pain medications), an obstruction and alteration of the digestive track, side effects of radiation, etc.

### Ways to Prevent Nausea and Vomiting:

- Avoid foods that are hard to digest.
- If the smell of hot food makes the patient feel ill, try cool or cold meals.
- Have the patient eat several small meals each day instead of three large ones.
- Position the patient with his/her head higher than his/her feet.
- If the patient feels nauseated when waking in the morning, give them some plain crackers.
- Have the patient drink more water.