

Information Sheet

Bowel Management

If you would like further information about Bowel Management, please feel free to discuss this with your Care Coordinator.

Bowel history

Taking a bowel history is an important part of your care plan and symptom management, particularly while taking some medications and undergoing treatments.

While this may feel somewhat intrusive, it allows the multi-disciplinary team caring for you to initiate a bowel management strategy. This is individually designed to give you greater comfort and reduce the pain which can accompany constipation.

Medication for pain, nausea and vomiting, anxiety, blood pressure, as well as some chemotherapies can contribute to slowing the bowel.

Assessment of your risk of constipation and early intervention can minimize constipation as a complication of your treatment.

Management of diarrhoea is also our aim. This may be from side effects of drugs administered, radiation therapy, infection or even stress and anxiety.

Communicating your past and ongoing bowel history to your nurses can provide accurate information for your medical team to assess your treatment.

Questions we will ask

- The frequency of your normal bowel movements prior to your treatment or change of medications?
- The ease of passing a normal motion?
- What medications you are taking?
- What works for you when you are constipated?
- What are your normal eating habits?

What we will ask at each visit

- Have your bowels opened?
- Was the motion large/medium/ small?
- Was the stool hard to pass/ formed/ soft/ liquid or bloody?
- Was the stool black or tarry?

The answers of these questions will allow the nurse to accurately chart your bowel function. This will also guide your General Practitioner when prescribing medications to relieve any constipation or diarrhoea. If diarrhoea is present you may be asked to have a stool specimen collected to check for any medications.



Taking a bowel history is an important part of your care.

Suggestions to help you prevent constipation

- Maintain a normal diet as much as you are able.
- High fibre (whole grains, vegetables, extra fruit).
- Plenty of fluid, especially water (6 – 8 glasses per day).

- Plenty of exercise – walking is best.
- Good posture on the toilet (with feet on a small block to raise the knees higher than hips, rest elbows on knees).
- Kiwi Crush, NuLax and other non medical products are available from your supermarket or health food shop.



Foods in high fibre help prevent constipation.

Bulking recipe to help prevent constipation

- 2 cups stewed apple
- 1 cup stewed prunes
- 1 cup baking bran

Mix together, store in fridge and take 1 – 2 tablespoons daily.

Medications that may help

- Bulking agents (Metamucil, Granacol) can help when you aren't eating enough fibre.
- Softening agents (Movicol), increase the volume of your stool and make it easier to pass.
- Stimulant laxatives (Senna, Bisocodyl) increase the activity of your bowel muscles. Sometimes these are combined with a softener (Coloxyl and Senna).