



"Lighting the way with better patient care."

Anova
HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Home Health • Hospice • Palliative • Home Care

HOSPICE PATIENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

MANAGING OPIOID INDUCED CONSTIPATION

Constipation is broadly defined as the passage of hard, dry stools less frequently than the patient's usual bowel-habit pattern. Patients and healthcare providers may differ in their assessments of what is considered constipation. The frequency of bowel movements (BM) is not the most critical factor (comfort having BMs is the important factor for the patient). Frequency of BM varies greatly from person-to-person, for example ranging from 3 BMs per day to 3 per week. Opioids are medications that are used for the relief of pain. They also slow the bowels leading to constipation. Constipation during opioid therapy is very common. A plan to prevent this should be started as soon as these medications are prescribed.

Signs and Symptoms of Constipation:

- Dry hard stools and straining during bowel movements.
- Incomplete passage of stool.
- Bloating and distension of abdomen.
- Cramping, nausea, vomiting, and reflux/heartburn.

What to report to the Hospice and Palliative Care Team?

Constipation may be embarrassing to discuss. However, it is very important for your care and comfort.

- Date and times of BMs
- Consistency of stool (hard, soft, liquid)
- Abdominal symptoms (bloating, distension, cramping, nausea, vomiting, reflux, heartburn, gas).
- Problems with passing stool (straining, incomplete passage of stool or diarrhea, hemorrhoidal pain or bleeding).
- Keep record of BMs

What can be done for Opioid Induced Constipation?

The goal for patients taking opioids is to have a BM at least every 2-3 days. The patient should not have hard stools or straining. Comfort with having a BM is the goal.

- Drink 8 glasses of fluid per day if able.
- Include fiber in the diet.
- Exercise if able.
- "Train" your bowels by sitting on the toilet at the same time daily.
- Do not fight the urge to have a BM even if in a public restroom.
- Keep a record for your BMs. List the day and time of the day you have a BM. Describe what the stool looks like List any problems you had during the BM.
- Walk or sit upright after meals. This helps with digestion.

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- Drink warm fluids with or after meals to stimulate the bowel
- If you are using bulk forming laxatives, be sure to drink enough fluids. Bulk forming laxatives require an adequate amount of fluid intake.
- Constipation may worsen if you are not taking enough fluids. If you are not able to drink enough fluids, tell your hospice and palliative care team.
- It is important to tell your hospice team if you are taking any over the counter medications. Tell the team if there have been any medication changes made since the last visit. Many medications can make constipation worse.
- Management usually requires stool softeners and laxatives. It may take a few changes to find the right medications and what works best for you.

