

Emergency Department

Constipation

General Information

Constipation is difficult or painful bowel movements, with hard, dry stools. Bowel movements may be less often than usual, depending on your normal pattern. It is not necessary to have a bowel movement every day. A common cause is not drinking enough fluids or not eating enough fiber. Poor bowel habits and certain medicines and diseases also may cause constipation.

Instructions

1. You may use medicines for constipation that you can buy without a prescription. Take only as directed by your doctor.
 - a. Stool softeners make the stool softer and easier to pass. Follow the directions on the label.
 - b. Laxatives help empty the bowel. Follow the directions on the label. **DO NOT** use laxatives or enemas regularly. This may lead to your being unable to pass stools when not taking laxatives and may cause constipation.
2. Eat a well-balanced, high fiber diet. Fiber makes stool larger, softer, and easier to pass. Good choices are fresh fruits and vegetables, whole-grain breads, oatmeal and bran cereal, and brown rice. Avoid constipating foods such as milk and dairy products and foods high in sugar.
3. Prunes are a natural laxative that can help with constipation. Use prunes and prune juice in small amounts.
4. Exercise regularly. Walking is a good choice.

Return to Emergency if any of the following develop

- You have fever and abdominal pain with the constipation.
- Your stool is black in colour or you are passing clots of blood.

Contact your Family Doctor if any of the following develop

- You have constipation that lasts longer than 2 weeks.

For more information or questions contact the HealthLinkBC at 811.

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