**Constipation**

*Causes and tips*

**Causes of Constipation**
- A change in the foods you eat or changes in when you eat
- Some prescription pain medicines such as opioids
- Not being as physically active as usual
- Cesarean birth and other types of surgery

**Tips to Ease Constipation**
- **Increase the amount of fluid** you drink. Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day, plus the liquids you drink with your meals.
  Signs that you are not drinking enough are:
  - You are urinating less than normal.
  - Your urine is dark-colored.
  - You feel dizzy when you stand up.
- **Eat high-fiber foods.** One of the best sources of fiber is breakfast cereal with 5 or more grams of fiber per serving. Read the Nutrition Facts label on the box to find the fiber content.
  Other high-fiber foods are dry and unsalted peanuts, whole wheat bread, parsnips, white or red grapefruit, cantaloupe, cooked carrots, prunes, green peas, baked beans, kidney beans, and split peas.
- **Try to have meals at the same time each day.** It helps to eat breakfast at the same time every day. This helps get your bowels on a regular schedule.
• If you are allowed to drink coffee, have some with your breakfast. Coffee helps your bowels move. Decaf works, too.
• Drink cold or warm prune juice with breakfast.
• Walk or do other light exercise after breakfast to increase the movement of food through your body.
• Most people feel the urge to have a bowel movement about 20 minutes after a meal. If you feel the urge, try to go right away instead of waiting. The body absorbs fluid from the bowel. This means constipation may be worse if you wait.
• Do not just sit on the toilet and read a book. Sitting on the toilet for a long time can cause painful swelling or hemorrhoids. Wait until you feel the urge to have a bowel movement, and then go and sit on the toilet.

Laxatives

After an operation, a laxative is sometimes needed to help get bowels moving. Your doctor may suggest a laxative or you can buy one over the counter (without a prescription) at any drugstore.

• Senna tablets: Usually work overnight.
• Milk of Magnesia liquid (magnesium hydroxide): Works overnight.
• Miralax or GaviLax (polyethylene glycol): Works in 1 to 3 days.
• Bisacodyl rectal suppositories: Work in about 20 minutes.
• Fleets enema: Works in about 15 minutes.

Call Your Healthcare Provider If You:

• Had a Cesarean birth and trying these tips for 3 days has not helped you have a bowel movement.
• Are sick to your stomach and throwing up.

Questions?
Your questions are important. If you have questions about constipation, call your healthcare provider during office hours.

Now, please go back to the Table of Contents of this workbook and check the box so your nurses will know you have read this chapter.