

---

---

## MANAGING CONSTIPATION

---

---

Managing constipation is a common symptom for patients dealing with a terminal diagnosis and can have a significant impact on the patient's quality of life. It can be very uncomfortable and should be treated as aggressively as other symptoms that cause discomfort near end of life.

### CONSTIPATION AND THE HOSPICE PHILOSOPHY

- Constipation is when bowel movements occur less often than the individual patient's normal pattern. Other examples are straining during bowel movement, hard stool, or incomplete emptying of the rectal vault during a bowel movement.
- It is best to prevent constipation whenever possible. HOWA nurses are trained to ask about bowel movements frequently. It is essential to let the nurse know whenever you are having any difficulty with eliminating stool.
- Prevention focuses on adequate fluid intake, a proper diet and activity. These are often difficult to increase in someone who is terminally ill, but even a small increase in fluid or activity can be beneficial. Increasing food intake may cause more discomfort and shouldn't be forced, but gently encouraging frequent small meals that are high in fiber may be helpful.
- There is much that you, your caregiver, and the hospice team can do to prevent/manage constipation.

### WHAT CAN BE DONE

- Your hospice team will assess your current difficulties with bowel elimination or your risk of developing constipation. Try to provide the information asked as the team tries to discover the underlying cause of your bowel difficulties.
- Record when bowel movements have occurred on the Bowel Elimination Log and add any additional information you feel may help the nurse with determining/obtaining treatment.
- Eat more fruits and high fiber foods and drink more fruit juice.
- Increase physical activity when possible. Walking even a short distance can be helpful.
- Sit upright on toilet, commode, or bedpan when trying to have a bowel movement.
- Take laxatives/stool softeners as ordered by your physician.
- Avoid bulk laxatives, such as Metamucil or Miralax, if not able to take in adequate fluids.
- Contact your hospice care team whenever interventions to prevent or manage constipation are not working.

### WHAT TO REPORT TO THE HOSPICE NURSE

- Report whenever you have no bowel movement in 2 days or a change in frequency of bowel movements occurs.
- Report pain, cramping, or tenderness.
- Report a feeling of fullness or bloating.
- Report blood in stools.
- Report diarrhea or oozing stool.
- Report straining to have a bowel movement, hard stool, or incomplete emptying when having a bowel movement.

*Remember there is a Hospice of West Alabama nurse available to you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to help you manage constipation or any other symptoms.*