

Managing Constipation

The following information is based on the general experiences of many prostate cancer patients. Your experience may be different. If you have any questions about what prostate cancer treatment services are covered by your health insurance, please contact your health care provider or health insurance provider.

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Please feel free to read only those parts of the booklet you need now. You don't need to read everything right now. You can always read more later.

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What Will I Learn By Reading This Booklet?

When you have **chemotherapy** (key-mo-ther-a-pee) to control your prostate cancer, you may have **side effects** or unwanted changes in your body. Side effects are different from person to person, and may be different from one treatment to the next. Some people have no or very mild side effects. The good news is that there are ways to deal with most of the side effects. In this booklet you will learn:

- What **constipation** is
- Why does chemotherapy cause constipation
- Things you can do to manage your constipation
- When to call your doctor

It is important for you to learn how to manage the side effects you may have from chemotherapy so that you can keep doing as many of your normal activities as possible.

Words that appear in **bold** (dark text) can be found in the “Key Words” section at the end of this booklet.

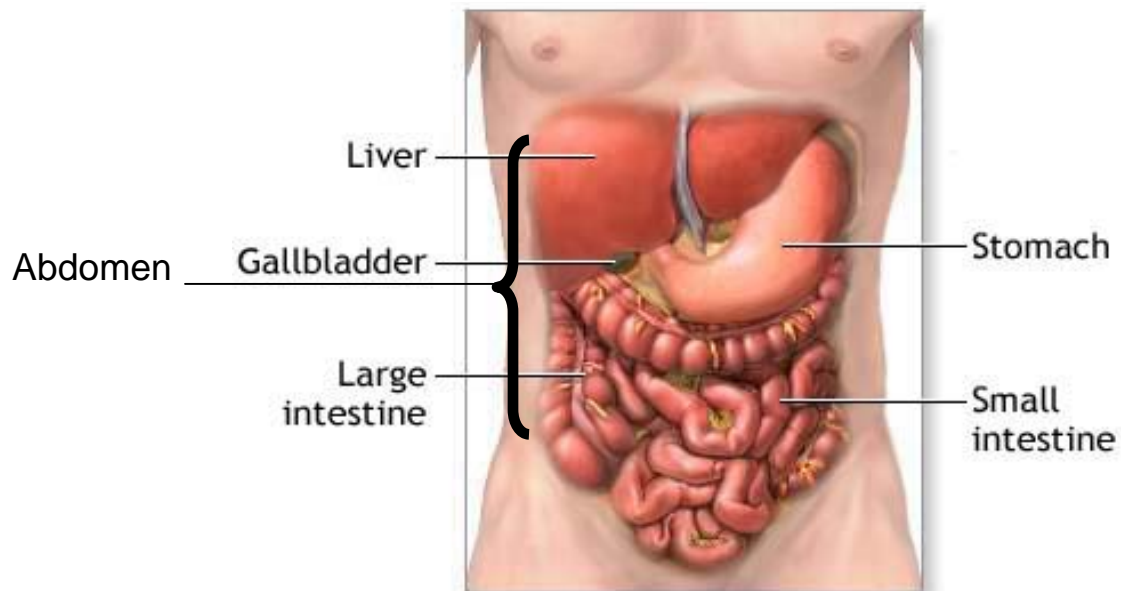
What Is Constipation?

Constipation is when your bowel movements become less regular than normal and your stool is hard, dry, and difficult to pass. You may have painful bowel movements and feel bloated or nauseous. You may burp, pass a lot of gas, and have stomach cramps or pressure in your rectum. This is a common side effect or unwanted change in your body from some chemotherapy medicines. The medicines your doctor gives you to help other side effects that you may get from your chemotherapy treatment may also cause constipation. Constipation can also be caused by what you eat, not drinking enough water or fluids, and not being as active as you normally are.

Why Does Chemotherapy Cause Constipation?

The powerful **anticancer** medicines you take can affect the healthy cells in your body, including the cells that line the inside of your intestines. Your intestines help your body to take in food, water, and other liquids. If your chemotherapy medicines affect the cells that line the inside of your intestines, your intestines may work too slowly. This causes your intestines to take in too much water. This makes your stool hard and dry.

Your Body's Digestive System



How May My Constipation Be Treated?

Constipation is a common side effect or unwanted change in your body when you have chemotherapy treatment. Constipation can make you feel very uncomfortable. The most important thing for you to remember is to not let your constipation go on for days and days, but to get help right away. If you do not have a bowel movement for two days, you should tell your health care team right away. There are medicines that your doctor or health care team can give to you that will make your constipation better.

What Can I Do To Manage My Constipation?

Just as every cancer patient's treatment is different, the way each person responds to his treatment is also different. While one person may have constipation, another may not. However, there are things you can do to help deal with this treatment side effect.

- Do not take any **over-the-counter** medicines (medicines you buy without a prescription from your doctor) for your constipation without talking to your doctor or health care team.
- Drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day. It is important to put back the fluids you lose. A glass of warm liquid when you first get up in the morning may start your bowels moving.



- Add more fiber to your diet. Eat more whole grains, such as bran muffins and cereals, wheat germ, and whole wheat bread, fresh fruits and vegetables, and prunes or prune juice.
- Eat fewer fatty foods (like fried fish, fried chicken, French fries or high fat milk products).
- Increase your daily exercise. Even a daily walk can help relieve constipation.

- Try not to push hard during bowel movements. This will lower your chance of getting **hemorrhoids**. Hemorrhoids are swollen veins around your anus, which are itchy or painful.
- Speak to your doctor and health care team about medicines you can take to help you.

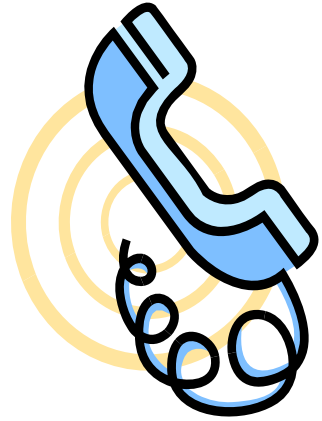
Plan For Managing Your Constipation

- What foods and drinks will help relieve your constipation?

- What foods should you stay away from if you have constipation?

- How do you get in touch with your doctor or health care team if you need help?

When Should I Call My Doctor?



You should call your doctor if:

- You have a fever higher than 100° F or 38° C
- You have pain in your stomach,
- You are unable to pass gas
- You have **nausea** (to feel sick) and/or **vomiting** (throwing up) with your constipation
- Your stomach looks swollen and/or feels hard when you touch it.
- You have not had a bowel movement in three days after following the directions your doctor has given you to relieve your constipation.

If you have any of these signs talk to your doctor or health care team. There are medicines and treatments that can help you feel better. It is important that you talk to your doctor or health care team about any side effects you may have during or after your treatment. Your health care team can help treat these problems.

Doctor's Name	
Doctor's office phone number	
Doctor's pager	

What Have I Learned By Reading This Booklet?

In this booklet, you learned about:

- What constipation is
- Why chemotherapy can cause constipation
- How to treat your constipation
- Things you can do to help manage your constipation
- When to call your doctor

If you have any questions, please talk to your doctor or health care team. It is important that you understand what is going on with your prostate cancer treatment. This knowledge will help you take better care of yourself and feel more in control so that you can get the most from your treatment.

Key Words

Anus: the opening through which stool passes out of your body. The act of passing stools is called a 'bowel movement' or 'opening your bowels'.

Anticancer: medicines used in the treatment of cancer.

Chemotherapy (key-mo-ther-a-pee): a prostate cancer treatment, which treats your whole body with powerful anticancer medicines to kill many of your prostate cancer cells.

Constipation: when your bowel movements become less regular than normal and your stool is hard, dry, and difficult to pass.

Hemorrhoids: a swollen area around your anus, which are itchy or painful.

Nausea: an unpleasant feeling in the back of your throat and stomach that may cause you to vomit.

Over-the-counter: medicines you buy without a prescription from your doctor.

Side Effects: unwanted changes in your body caused by your prostate cancer treatment.

Vomiting: a powerful tightening of your stomach muscles that causes the contents of your stomach to come up through your mouth; Throwing up.