

What is a bowel routine?

A bowel routine is a schedule for taking medicines regularly to prevent or relieve constipation (trouble moving or emptying your bowels). These types of medicines are also called laxatives.

Why do I need a bowel routine?

Having a bowel routine will help keep your movements regular. Being constipated can be uncomfortable and make you feel unwell. If you don't treat your constipation, it can lead to serious medical problems. Constipation can be a side effect of pain medicine (also called opioid analgesics, like codeine or morphine). Constipation is one of the most common problems that cancer patients experience.

What can make constipation worse?

- Chemotherapy treatments.
- Lack of fluid and fiber intake.
- Decrease or lack of daily activity.
- Taking pain, anti-nausea, and other medications can also contribute.

How can I prevent constipation?

Remember: preventing constipation is easier than treating it!

- Drink 8-10 glasses of decaffeinated beverages each day, unless advised otherwise by your health care team.
- Do some light exercise, such as walking 15 to 20 minutes once or twice a day.
- Take fiber or natural laxatives and/or stool softeners, following a bowel routine.

The goal is to have a bowel movement every 2 to 3 days, or as close to your normal pattern as possible.

Constipation is when you're unable to pass a stool or have very hard stools. People normally have bowel movements every one to three days. If you're moving your bowels less than usual but not having difficulty passing stool, you are probably not constipated.

Steps to prevent or treat constipation include:

1. Begin with a stool softener and gentle laxative

- Senokot-S one to two (1-2) tablets with plenty of fluids two to three times a day.
Senna (Senokot) and Docusate (Colace)

2. If there is no bowel movement within 48 hours, add one of the following:

- MiraLAX, one to two (1-2) tablespoons one to two times a day
- Dulcolax 5 mg tablet, one to two (1-2) tablets

3. If there is no bowel movement in 72 hours, try one of the following

(After talking with your doctor or nurse):

- Dulcolax 10 mg suppository
- Magnesium of Citrate, 8 oz
- Fleet enema (may need to repeat)

A few tips

- Pain medications can be very constipating. If you take pain medications you will need to talk to your doctor or nurse, and follow the above
- All the above are over the counter (nonprescription) medications
- Drinking lots of fluids (eight to 10 glasses a day), eating foods high in fiber, and exercising all help prevent constipation.
- If frequent or loose stools develop, decrease your laxatives by one-half.
- If you do not move your bowels despite the above measures, please call your doctor or nurse.