



St Margaret's
Hospice Care

Constipation relief without drugs

Information for patients



What do we mean by constipation?

If you are experiencing any of the following, you may be constipated:

- Difficulty passing stools
- Hard and small stools
- Pain when passing stools
- Passing stools less frequently than is normal for you

What causes constipation?

Constipation is a common problem and there are many causes, some of which are listed here:

- Medication (particularly if you are taking a pain medicine from the group called opioids)
- Change in diet (taking less fibre)
- Drinking less fluids than usual
- Reduced mobility
- A change in your daily routine
- Lack of privacy
- Becoming less well

What are the effects of constipation?

You may experience some of the following:

- General discomfort in your abdomen/stomach
- Loss of appetite
- Bloating
- Abdominal pain (sometimes described as colic)
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Difficulty passing urine

Constipation can really affect how you feel. Please do not be embarrassed talking about it. There are things which can be done to help.

Tips to help prevent or relieve constipation

While there are medications which can help relieve constipation, there other are things you can do to help:

Increase your daily fibre intake, foods which are high in fibre include:

- Wholemeal bread and brown rice, cereals (muesli, oats, bran)
- Nuts and seeds, dried fruit (prunes, apricots & raisins)
- Fruit & vegetables

Increase your daily fluid intake (this can include foods such as gravy, sauces, fruit juice, jelly and ice lollies).

Although we know that increasing fibre and fluids can help constipation, if you find this difficult, it is more important that you eat and drink what you enjoy.

It is important to be in the right position when sitting on the toilet - aim to sit with your knees higher or the same level than your hips (you may need a footrest to achieve this). Lean forward and place your elbows on your knees, relax your abdomen and straighten your spine.

It is also important to get to the toilet promptly if you feel the urge to go, as the longer stools sit in the colon, the harder they become and therefore more difficult to empty your bowels.

Try to maintain your mobility if you can, but we appreciate that you may be unable to for a variety of reasons.

Our complementary therapists also have treatments available which can be beneficial, such as reflexology and abdominal massage.

There may be times when you just need to talk to someone, as 'feeling low' or 'anxious' can also contribute to constipation. If you come to the hospice then any of our clinical team will be happy to chat with you. We also have a spiritual care team, social workers, counsellors, and complementary therapists at St Margaret's Hospice Care.

If symptoms persist please inform your doctor or nurse.



St Margaret's Hospice Care Taunton Hospice,

Heron Drive, Bishops Hull, Taunton, TA1 5HA

 01823 333822

St Margaret's Hospice Care Yeovil Hospice,

Little Tarrat Lane, Yeovil, BA20 2HU

 01935 709480

 CRC@st-margarets-hospice.org.uk

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