Managing Constipation

What is constipation?
- Bowel movements occurring less often than what is the normal pattern
- Hard stool
- Increased difficulty moving bowels

What to report to the hospice/palliative care team?
- No bowel movement in 2 days or a change in the frequency of bowel movements
- Pain, cramping, tenderness
- A feeling of fullness or bloating
- Blood in stools
- Diarrhea or oozing stools

What can be done?
The good news is that there is much you, your caregiver and the hospice/palliative care team can do for constipation. The team will try to discover the underlying cause and discuss treatments best for you.
- Record when the bowel movements have occurred. An example of a Bowel Movement Record is attached to this document and available in the Managing Constipation Teaching Sheet on the HPNA Website at: http://www.hpna.org/DisplayPage.aspx?Title=Patient/Family%20Teaching%20Sheets
- Follow a regular bowel regimen, even if you are not constipated (many medications can cause constipation)
  - Drink as much fluid (liquids) as is comfortable. Drinking warm liquids may promote bowel movement
  - Eat more fruits and fruit juices, including prunes and prune juice
  - Increase physical activity if possible. Walking can be beneficial
  - Take laxatives/stool softeners as ordered by healthcare provider
  - Sit upright on toilet, commode or bedpan
  - Establish routine times for toileting
  - Avoid bulk laxatives if not taking enough fluids
- Notify hospice/palliative care team if constipation continues
Other HPNA Teaching Sheets on are available at www.HPNA.org.

Reference


Approved by the HPNA Education Committee, January 2007, reviewed by the Education Services Committee, May 2011

orig. 01 07, rev. 05 11
## BOWEL MOVEMENT RECORD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE and TIME of BM</th>
<th>CONSISTENCY of STOOL</th>
<th>ABDOMINAL SYMPTOMS</th>
<th>PROBLEMS WITH PASSING STOOL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examples include: hard, soft, liquid</td>
<td>Examples include: bloating, distention, gas cramping, nausea, vomiting, reflux, heartburn</td>
<td>Examples include: straining, incomplete passage of stool, leakage of stool, diarrhea, hemorrhoidal pain or bleeding</td>
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**QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS FOR THE HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE HEALTH TEAM**