



A Teaching Affiliate
of Harvard Medical School

Plumbing 101: Managing Your Bowels During Treatment

The Center for Breast Cancer
Mass General Cancer Center



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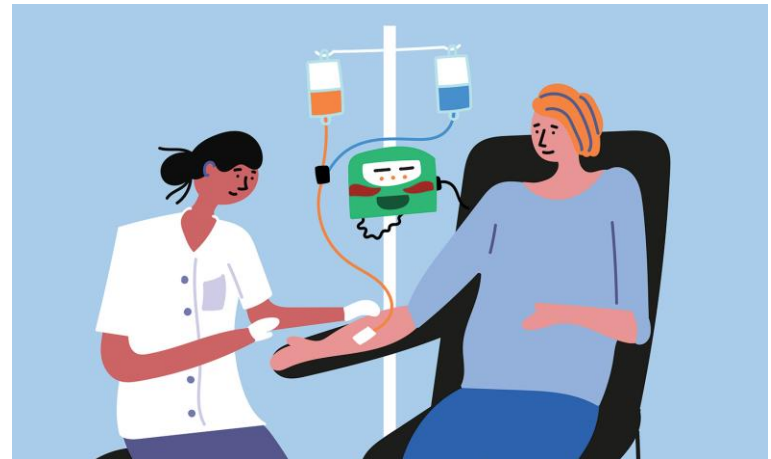
How does cancer treatment affect the bowels?

- Cancer treatment and medications that help to manage treatment side effects (supportive medications) can change:
 - How rapidly or slowly your digestive tract processes food and creates stool
 - The natural flora in your bowel
 - The delicate mucosa in your bowel
- This can **cause**:
 - Diarrhea: the passage of liquid or unformed stools, or frequent passage of stool (3 or more times daily)
 - Constipation: the passage of hard, dry stool or delayed passage of stool (3 or less bowel movements/week)



Diarrhea: Causes

- Many cancer treatments can cause diarrhea:
 - Capecitabine (Xeloda)
 - Pertuzumab (Perjeta)
 - Taxanes (Taxol, Taxotere)-usually mild
 - Palbociclib (Ibrance)-usually mild
 - Abemaciclib (Verzenio)
 - Lapatinib (Tykerb)
 - Neratinib (Nerlynx)
 - Tucatanib (Tukysa)
 - Alpelisib (Piqray)
 - Sacituzumab govitecan (Trodelvy)



Diarrhea: Causes

- Supportive medications used to manage treatment side effects can also cause diarrhea:
 - Reglan
 - Antibiotics
 - Magnesium supplements
- Bowel infections are uncommon but can develop:
 - When your immune system is lowered from cancer treatment
 - After staying in the hospital or a long-term care facility
 - After taking an antibiotic, usually for a prolonged period of time



How can I manage diarrhea with my diet?

- Eat a bland diet that is easy to digest until you feel better
 - BRAT diet: Bananas, Rice, Applesauce, and White Toast
 - Plain noodles, mashed potatoes, and steamed chicken or turkey are also fine.
- Do **not** eat fatty or fried foods, dairy, or high fiber food. Stay away from:
 - Raw vegetables or fruits, whole grain breads, nuts or seeds
 - Products containing milk
 - Caffeine, alcohol and spicy foods
 - Beans and carbonated beverages, which may also cause gas
- Drink 8-10 glasses (64-80 ounces) of non-caffeinated beverages daily to prevent dehydration
 - Gatorade or Pedialyte are sometimes preferred to water w/ severe diarrhea as both contain electrolytes
- Eat small meals every few hours instead of 3 large meals each day
- Log onto [massgeneral.org/cancer/nutrition](https://www.massgeneral.org/cancer/nutrition) for recipes to help with diarrhea



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Medications for Diarrhea

- **Imodium (loperamide)** is the drug of choice for diarrhea during cancer treatment
 - Available over-the-counter, no prescription needed
 - Instructions for Imodium:
 - Take 2 tablets (4mg) with your first loose/watery stool
 - Take 1 tablet (2mg) every 4 hours thereafter/or with each loose stool thereafter
 - Do not take more than 8 tablets (16mg) in a day
 - For diarrhea that does not respond to Imodium, please contact your care team. We can prescribe something stronger



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Constipation: Causes

- Cancer treatments:
 - Vinorelbine (Navelbine)
 - Eribulin (Halaven)
 - Kadcylla (Ado-trastuzumab emtansine) - usually mild
- Supportive Medications
 - Nausea Medications: Ondansetron (Zofran) and Palonosetron (Aloxi)
 - Iron Supplements
 - Pain Medications: Hydrocodone, Oxycodone, Morphine, Fentanyl, and Hydromorphone
- Dehydration – not drinking enough fluids
- Eating a low-fiber diet
- Inactivity



Medications to Manage Constipation

	To Prevent Constipation	To Treat Constipation	
Drug Name Generic(Brand)	docusate(Colace) <i>stool softener</i>	senna(Sennakot)	Miralax <i>powder</i>
How much and when to take	1 capsule in morning 1 capsule in evening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 tablet twice daily in addition to docusate Start with 8.6mg strength not the 25 mg 	17 grams dissolved in 8 ounces of fluid daily. Measuring cup is provided with the powder.
Helpful Info	Helps to soften stool and should not cause diarrhea.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps to stimulate a bowel movement If needed, take 1 more tablet at a time until you are having a daily bowel movement 	May be taken in addition to senna if senna alone does not cause a daily bowel movement.



Medications to Manage Constipation

If you are taking **chronic pain medications** or are on a cancer treatment which is known to cause constipation, your care team may ask you to start a daily **Bowel Regimen**: a schedule of medications to help manage constipation.



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How can I manage constipation?

- Diet:

- Drink 8-10 glasses (64-80 ounces) of non-caffeinated beverages daily (water, Gatorade, ginger ale, juice)
- Eat foods high in fiber (vegetables, fruits, whole grains)
- Prune juice or dried prunes are excellent
- Log onto massgeneral.org/cancer/nutrition for recipes help with constipation

- Stay active:

- Walking just 20-30 minutes daily helps to naturally stimulate your digestive tract



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When to call our office

Call us if you:

- Haven't had a bowel movement in 3 days, despite using Senna and/or Miralax
 - We may prescribe you a stronger laxative
- Are constipated and are also having uncontrollable vomiting
- See blood in your stool
- Have severe abdominal pain



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Contact Information

- Boston: 617-726-6500
- Waltham: 781-487-6100
- Patient Portal: patientgateway.org



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