

# How to Deal with Constipation While You Are Taking Prescription Pain Medicine

## Constipation

Constipation is a side effect of taking prescription pain medicine.

The medicine causes the stool to move slower than normal through your intestines. Water is also reabsorbed by your intestines, resulting in hard stools that are difficult to pass.

Signs of constipation are:

- fewer number of bowel movements
- small, hard stools that are difficult to pass
- feeling bloated and uncomfortable
- gas
- abdominal cramping.

## How To Prevent Constipation

- Drink 6 to 8 large glasses (8 ounces) of liquids each day. Liquids add moisture to stool, making them easier to pass. Water and juice are your best choices. Caffeine (coffee, tea or soda) or alcohol can make constipation worse.
- Be as active as you can each day. Walking around your house or apartment will help. Follow your health care provider's directions for exercise. (Lack of exercise can make constipation worse.)
- Try to have a bowel movement when you feel the urge. Do not ignore the urge. Do not strain during a bowel movement.

- Eat a high-fiber diet. Each day:
  - Eat a healthful diet.
  - Drink plenty of water.
  - Eat fresh fruits, raw vegetables and other foods high in fiber.

## Use Of Constipation Medicines

As long as you are taking prescription pain medicine, you may need to take a laxative to avoid constipation. Common products include:

- stimulant laxatives. These cause the colon to have a bowel movement. Examples include Senokot<sup>®</sup>, Miralax<sup>®</sup>, Correctol<sup>®</sup> and Dulcolax<sup>®</sup>. Follow package directions.
- stool softeners. These add moisture to the stools to make the stool softer and easier to pass. Examples include Docusate<sup>®</sup> and Colace<sup>®</sup>. Follow package directions.

**Note:** If you usually take a fiber product to help you have regular bowel movements, it is not a laxative. Please use the medicines listed above if you are constipated.

## When To Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if:

- your constipation does not improve after you:
  - made diet changes
  - made exercise changes
  - tried laxatives or stool softeners
- you have not had a bowel movement in 3 days
- you have severe or sudden abdominal pain
- you have blood in your stool.

## Constipation Can Cause Diarrhea

If you have severe constipation, the hard stool builds up in the colon and causes irritation. This irritation causes diarrhea (several watery stools). If this happens, call your health care provider.

Most important, do not take medicine to stop the diarrhea.