

## Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

## 4. Constipation

Constipation means that you are not able to open your bowels (poo) as regularly as you normally do. It can be a common problem, but many people find it embarrassing to talk about it.

Constipation is a very common symptom in cancer patients. Eating a diet low in fibre, dehydration, medication (including certain pain killers and some chemotherapy drugs), practical problems (including immobility, inactivity or lack of privacy), spinal cord compression and colorectal cancer itself are some of the most common causes.

However, there can be a variety of other reasons why constipation has developed; for example: eating less, nausea, difficulties swallowing and depression can each act as contributory factors. All these can be thought about as possibly causes.

### Signs of Constipation

- Moving your bowels less than you usually do
- Your stools (poo) becoming harder
- Straining to move your bowels
- A feeling of not having emptied your bowel but being unable to pass more stool
- Your tummy becoming bloated or uncomfortable

Everyone's normal bowel pattern is different, but as a general guide, you should let your doctor or nurse know if you have not had a bowel movement for three days, unless that is usual for you.

### How can I manage my constipation?

- Ensure that you include plenty of fibre (roughage) in your daily diet. Good sources of fibre include whole-grain breakfast cereals like porridge, Weetabix, Shredded Wheat, muesli; wholemeal bread and flour; brown rice; wholemeal pasta; fresh fruit and vegetables, beans and pulses (e.g. lentils).
- Drink plenty of fluids. Both hot and cold drinks will be helpful. Aim to drink at least 2 litres a day.
- It is important to eat regular meals each day and gentle exercise will help to keep your bowels moving.
- Common natural remedies for constipation are syrup of figs, dried fruit such as prunes, figs, apricots and dates, and prune juice.
- If the constipation is due to the medicines that you are taking (such as painkillers or anti-sickness drugs) you may need to take laxatives. Your doctor should prescribe these.

**If you have cancer of the bowel, or you think that your bowels may be affected by your cancer treatment, always speak to your doctor, dietician or specialist nurse for advice about dealing with constipation.**

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## - Resources/Information

### Local Resources:

<p><b>North Devon Bowel and Bladder Care</b></p> <p>Crown Yealm House, Pathfields Business Park, South Molton EX36 3LH</p> <p>Tel: 01392 675336 Email: <a href="mailto:ndht.bladderandbowel@nhs.net">ndht.bladderandbowel@nhs.net</a></p> <p><b>If you feel you need help with bladder or bowel problems, please ask your GP to refer you to us</b></p>	<p>A multi-disciplinary team of Nurses and Physiotherapists who assess and treat a variety of complex bladder, bowel and pelvic floor problems. The service also provides education, support and advice to other healthcare professionals. The service is also responsible for the pad service for Devon.</p> <p>Housebound patients with Bladder and Bowel problems will have their needs assessed by the Community Nursing Team from your local surgery, and all mobile patients are seen in our clinics.</p>
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### National Resources:

<p><b>Macmillan Toilet Card</b></p> <p>Available from your CNS or the Seamoor Unit, North Devon District Hospital, Raleigh Park, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 4JB 01271 311579</p>	<p>This card can help if you need to use the toilet urgently when you are out as a result of your cancer treatment. Show this card to staff in shops etc to allow access to their facilities.</p>
<p><b>RADAR Key (See also Just Can't Wait Card below) £4.50</b></p> <p>Available from <a href="http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org">www.disabilityrightsuk.org</a></p>	<p>This unlocks locked Radar Key Region public toilets. There are national regional lists showing where the toilets are.</p>
<p><b>Macmillan Cancer Support Line</b></p> <p><a href="http://www.macmillan.org.uk">www.macmillan.org.uk</a></p> <p>Call <b>0808 808 00 00</b> — 7 days a week 8am—8pm</p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. Please note that calls to this number are not free when made from outside the UK. If you are calling from outside of the UK call on <b>+44 207 091 2230</b></p>
<p><a href="#">Macmillan on-line Community</a></p>	<p>Online support— to share experiences or vent your emotions find others who understand—join today!</p>
<p><b>Marie Curie Support Line</b> — Living with a terminal illness and looking for support</p> <p><a href="http://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support">www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support</a></p>	<p>Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. The Support Line is open 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday and 11am – 5pm Saturday</p>

### Other Resources :

<p><b>Macmillan Booklet</b></p>	<p>Recipes for people affected by cancer — <b>MAC15201</b></p>
<p></p>	<p>Managing the symptoms of cancer— <b>MAC11671</b></p>
<p></p>	<p>Healthy Eating and Cancer—<b>MAC13612</b></p>
<p></p>	<p>Understanding chemotherapy — <b>MAC11619</b></p>
<p></p>	<p>Understanding radiotherapy— <b>MAC11640</b></p>
<p><b>Marie Curie Leaflet:</b></p>	<p>Advice on constipation</p>