



What is constipation and what causes it?

Constipation is a common condition where you have difficulty opening your bowels. It affects many people who have cancer or are having cancer treatment. Whilst everyone's normal bowel pattern is different, if you have not had a bowel movement for three days, you should speak to your GP, cancer doctor or lung cancer nurse specialist.

The signs and symptoms of constipation can include:

- having less frequent bowel movements
- straining when passing stools (faeces)
- your stools (faeces) becoming harder
- feeling bloated and experiencing wind
- pain in your stomach or back passage

Constipation can be caused by medications, chemical imbalances in the blood or even a change in diet. Being less mobile or lack of fluid (dehydration) can cause or worsen constipation.

What can be done to help relieve constipation?

Try not to feel too embarrassed to discuss this issue. The health professionals involved in your care will assess you and will be able to give advice. They may prescribe laxatives to help relieve your constipation. Although you can buy many laxatives over the counter at the chemist, speak to your lung cancer nurse specialist before taking them to ensure you are taking ones to help you. Laxatives can come in many forms – tablets, capsules, syrups and powders to be added to water. If the constipation is severe, you may be prescribed enemas or suppositories to be inserted into your back passage.



Tips to help with constipation:

- Drink plenty of fluids. Try to drink at least 6-8 glasses per day. Try to limit the amount of caffeine, alcohol and fizzy drinks you consume.
- Have plenty of fibre in your diet. Foods rich in fibre include fresh fruit and vegetables, brown rice, wholegrain cereals, kidney beans, lentils and chickpeas. When eating bread choose wholemeal, wholegrain, granary or multi-seed bread.
- Exercise can affect your bowel habits. Try gradually increasing the amount of exercise you do. Walking, swimming and cycling each day will help to keep your bowels moving. It will also leave you feeling healthier and improve your mood, energy levels and general fitness.
- Don't ignore the urge to go to the toilet. When you do go, some people find that leaning forward and relaxing will help them open their bowels more easily.

GIVING HELP AND HOPE

The charity has two aims:

Supporting people living with lung cancer - Working closely with lung cancer nurses, we provide information, run lung cancer support groups and offer telephone and online support. Our patient grants offer some financial help to people affected by lung cancer.

Saving lives - We fund lung cancer research, campaign for better treatment and care for people who have lung cancer, and raise awareness of the importance of early diagnosis. Our lung cancer prevention work helps people to quit smoking and encourages young people not to start smoking.

Call us on 0333 323 7200 (option 2)

This information has been taken from the following sources:
Lung cancer—answering your questions: Managing lung cancer symptoms 2014