

## How to Prevent Opioid Constipation

Opioids (OH-pee-oyds) are some of the strongest medicines prescribed for pain. Common names are morphine, hydrocodone, OxyCODONE™ and methadone. There are other brand names, too.

Like many other pain relief medicines, these can make you constipated. Your bowels are less active than normal when you take these drugs. You could have belly pain or a harmful blockage if stools become hard and slow to move. A severe blockage could injure your bowels.

Constipation is a serious side effect of opioid medicines. Simple changes in diet and activity can help you avoid constipation.

- Eat more fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Drink more water and other fluids.
- Walk

Stay ahead of constipation. Take a stool softener and a gentle laxative as well as change your diet and activity. Soft stools move easily through your bowels. A laxative makes your bowels move more often. Take more tablets if your doctor increases your opioid dose. You need more laxative than what is required to manage constipation caused by what you eat.

If you become constipated, contact the doctor who prescribes your opioids. You may need to be on a bowel program. A common bowel program includes:

- 1 to 3 tablets of docusate sodium (100 to 300 milligrams) each day, plus
- 2 to 6 tablets of senna 2 times each day.

Start with docusate (DOK-u-sate) and senna unless your health care team suggests a different pair of drugs. Buy them as a combination or buy them separately.

In general, we advise you not to use products like Metamucil™ and Fiberall™. High fiber or bulk forming laxatives require you to drink a lot of water. They absorb water and expand. If you do not drink enough water, stools may harden and not move as well through your bowel. Taking these products with too little water can make your problem worse.

| <b>Stool Softeners</b>   | <b>Gentle Laxatives</b>   | <b>Other Bowel Movers</b>   |
|--|---|---|
| <p><b>Ducosate sodium</b><br/>Generic or brand like Colace®</p>  | <p><b>Natural senna tablets</b><br/>Generic or brand like Senokot®</p>              | <p><b>Combined stool softener and laxative</b><br/>Generic or brand like Peri-Colace®</p> |
| <p><b>Docusate calcium</b><br/>Generic or brand like Surfak®</p> | <p><b>Bisacodyl (bis-a-KOE-dil) tablets</b><br/>Generic or brand like Dulcolax®</p> | <p><b>Milk of magnesia</b><br/>Liquid or chewable tablets, generic or brand</p>           |

**If you are already constipated**

Try a suppository. Put it in your rectum (bottom) to help your bowels move. Use one or both types:

- A bisacodyl suppository if you think stool is soft
- A glycerin suppository if you think the stool is hard.

You can buy them over the counter at any drug store. You may have to take both types to get results. If your bowels do not move, contact your doctor’s office that day. Do not give yourself an enema unless you are told to by your doctor or nurse.