

4. Constipation

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.

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. *(If you are having problems with Eating or Appetite see information on this elsewhere in the directory.)*
- 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.

Local Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
Plymouth Community Healthcare Provides a continence nursing service locally to reduce the incidence of bladder and bowel dysfunction. Provides comprehensive and effective assessment, treatment advice and review. Please note that patients who require provision of incontinence pads should be referred to their own District Nurse via their GP surgery	Plymouth Community Healthcare 01752 434759 Open referral service
Macmillan Toilet Card 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	Mustard Tree, Derriford Hospital: Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm 01752 430060/01752 431468 Kingsbridge: Tuesdays 10am to 4pm 01548 852349 Liskeard: Thursdays 10am to 4pm 01579 373500 Tavistock: Fridays 10am to 4pm 01822 615935
RADAR Key This will enable you to use locked public toilets.	A key is available at £4.50 from Disability Rights UK Tel: 0207 250 8191 Website: disabilityrightsuk.org
Mustard Tree Cancer Support & Triangle Drop In Centres Ask questions, share concerns, offers a range of services including benefits advice. Support, advice and information for cancer patients and their carers	Mustard Tree, Derriford Hospital: Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm 01752 430060/01752 431468 Kingsbridge: Tuesdays 10am to 4pm 01548 852349 Liskeard: Thursdays 10am to 4pm 01579 373500 Tavistock: Fridays 10am to 4pm 01822 615935
Other Resources	Your GP, Oncology Doctor, Specialist nurse or District Nurse.

National Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
The Bladder and Bowel Foundation Provides information on how to manage bladder problems.	www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org Helpline: 0845 345 0165 General Enquiries: 01536 533 255
Age UK	www.ageuk.org.uk
NHS Choices – living with incontinence	www.nhs.uk
Macmillan Cancer Support Provide comprehensive advice and information on all aspects of cancer.	www.macmillan.org.uk 0808 808 0000 (Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm)

Further information:

Macmillan Cancer Support booklets: – Available free from the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre
Cancer and complementary therapies
Pelvic radiotherapy
Controlling cancer pain
Controlling the symptoms of cancer
Understanding chemotherapy
Understanding radiotherapy