

BOWEL MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

People with developmental disability are at risk for constipation because of certain medications, decreased activity, decreased fluid intake, and inability to verbalize. Constipation can be and often is painful. Untreated constipation can lead to bowel obstruction and death.

What causes constipation?

- **All pain medications cause constipation!**
- **Change in dietary habits** (food and fluid): Adequate fluids are needed to prevent the body from reabsorbing fluid from the bowel, which in turn, causes the stool to be hard. Adequate roughage is needed to stimulate muscle activity in the bowel to push the stool along.
- **Change in activity level** due to physical restrictions: An air-fluid lock can collect in the bowel loops and the smooth muscle of the bowel may be too weak to push the fluid along. Exercise helps strengthen those muscles.
- **Certain medications** can cause constipation as a side effect.
- **Diseases** can cause constipation.
- **Chemotherapy** or radiation can cause constipation.
- **The aging process** can cause constipation as the digestive system slows down.

What are the signs of constipation?

- **Change** in frequency of bowel movement.
- **Change** in quantity of bowel movement.
- **Change** in consistency of bowel movement.
- **Decreased** appetite.
- **Extended** time in the bathroom trying to go.
- **Change** in behavior!

Recipe to prevent constipation(from Anne Maloy, ARNP)

½ cup applesauce

½ cup prune juice

½ cup *Kellogg's® Bran Buds®* cereal

Mix together and take 2-3 tablespoons initially until results are obtained, then 1-2 tablespoons per day. Can be made ahead of time and stored in refrigerator.

How Can I prevent it?

- **Monitor for constipation.** If the person cannot reliable self-monitor or self-report, or if more than one person is responsible for the care of the person, it is highly recommended that a tool be used that clearly identifies what constitutes small, medium, large and extra large.
- **Consistency matters!** An individual can have loose or liquid stools around an impaction so it is imperative that you report changes in a timely way!
- **Know the person's medical history.** If they have a history of risk factors, closely monitor them for signs and symptoms of constipation. Assess if individual was a chronic laxative user before moving in.
- Consult with the person's health care provider to **determine if an exercise regimen is indicated** and support the person in following it.
- **Ensure that the person gets adequate fluids.** Everyone should consume at least eight 8-ounce glasses of non-caffeine beverages per day, more in warm weather.
- **Consult with the person's health care provider** to add a stool softener/ laxative combination that can be increased as needed, essential when the person is taking pain medications!

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- Notify the person's health care provider.
- If the symptoms are serious or the individual looks extremely ill, call 911.
- Inform whoever may be treating the person of their bowel habits, risk factors, and last bowel movement.

