Dealing with Constipation

Constipation occurs when bowel movements become less frequent and stools become hard, dry or difficult to pass. You may have painful bowel movements, feel bloated or have nausea. You may belch, pass a lot of gas or have stomach cramps or pressure in the rectum.

**What causes constipation?**

Chemotherapy, the location of your cancer, certain medications, lack of activity, and stress may cause your bowels to slow down. Constipation may also occur when your diet is low in fiber or your fluid intake is low.

Adding fiber slowly into your diet can help with constipation, but it should be added slowly over several days. A well balanced diet that includes fruit, vegetables and whole grain products is a good start to a high fiber diet.

**How do I increase the fiber in my diet?**

**Fruits and Vegetables:**

- Most raw fruits and vegetables are very high in fiber content.
- Cooked or steamed fruits and vegetables may be a better option if you have chewing and swallowing problems or mouth pain.
- Prune juice may be helpful as a mild laxative. Bulk can be added by using dried fruits such as raisins, prunes or dates.

**Whole Grains:**

- **Select whole-wheat versions of:**
  - Pasta
  - Bread
  - Crackers
  - Tortillas

- **The following whole grain cereals are good sources of fiber:**
  - Shredded Wheat ®
  - Raisin Brain ®
  - Bran Flakes ®
  - All Bran ®
  - Rolled Oats
  - Granola
  - Unprocessed Bran or Oat Bran

- If eating solid food is difficult, try adding bran to cooked cereal, fruit juice, milk, pudding or milkshakes. This will soften crunchy foods or cereals and make them easier to chew.
Meat alternatives that are high in fiber include:
- Dried peas
- Beans
- Lentils
- Nuts

Fluids:
- Stay hydrated by drinking 8 to 10 glasses daily (64-80 fluid ounces).
  - Whenever increasing fiber in your diet, make sure to drink plenty of fluids.
  - Water sources include: tea, juice, milk, Powerade®, Gatorade®
  - Drink hot liquids, many people find drinking warm or hot liquids (tea, coffee or soup) can help relieve constipation.

Activity Level:
- An increase in activity will help with bowel movements. Always check with your physician before making any drastic changes in your daily exercise routine.

*) Always discuss with your physician first if you decide to take over the counter medications to help with constipation.*