ST. FRANCIS 24/7 CALL CENTER: (321) 269-4240

St. Francis REFLECTIONS® Hospice
Established 1977 • Licensed 1990

Constipation Management

Constipation is common in hospice patients, frequently due to medications (especially opioids), reduced fluid intake, or lack of mobility. Constipation can cause discomfort, pain and agitation. Patients can experience hard, difficult to pass or infrequent stools that may cause a significant amount of pain, anxiety, and agitation.

Bowel habits differ from person to person, the goal for hospice patients is a bowel movement at least once every three (3) days.

Common signs and symptoms to monitor for:

- Dry, hard pebble-like stools
- Infrequent bowel movements (less than every three (3) days)
- Straining or discomfort during bowel movements
- Abdominal bloating or pain
- Loss of appetite
- Oozing, watery leakage of stool (bowel obstruction)
- Rectal pain or pressure
- Nausea

Tips for Constipation Management:

- **Medications**: Use prescribed stool softeners, laxatives, or enemas. Common options include docusate sodium, Senna, or polyethylene glycol. Follow the instructions carefully. If the patient is on any type of opioid a bowel regimen must be in place (as needed or scheduled).
- **Hydration**: Encourage the patient to drink fluids regularly. Warm drinks (like tea) can help stimulate bowel movements. If the patient is unable to drink, consult the hospice team for other options.

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- **Diet**: If the patient can eat, offer foods high in fiber, such as fruits (pears, prunes), vegetables, and whole grains. Pureed foods or smoothies can be easier to consume and digest.
- **Physical Activity**: Encourage light movement if possible. Even gentle leg lifts or turning in bed can help stimulate the digestive system.
- **Regular Routine**: Establish a regular time for toileting, usually after meals. Encourage sitting upright on toilet, bedside commode, or bedpan. The body's natural reflexes can be leveraged to stimulate bowel movements.

Record and Report to St. Francis:

- New or worsened constipation, no bowel movement in three (3) days.
- Other symptoms such as pain, cramping, tenderness, feelings of fullness or bloating, nausea/vomiting, straining, diarrhea, pain or rectal bleeding.

St. Francis Reflections is always available to assist with any questions or concerns 24/7

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