



# UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO HOSPITAL

## Information for Patients and their Families

### RADIATION ONCOLOGY

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## LAXATIVE PROTOCOL

Constipation is a common problem for cancer patients. Pain medications, such as morphine, Percocet<sup>®</sup>, and codeine frequently cause constipation. Other causes include certain chemotherapy drugs, poor food and fluid intake, and decreased activity. In many cases proper diet, fluids, and exercise can help relieve constipation. If not, it may be necessary to follow a laxative protocol.

Instructions to regulate your daily bowel movement pattern should be followed just as carefully as your doctor's other instructions. The suggestions are guidelines to relieve or prevent constipation in patients taking certain pain medications (opioids) that cause constipation. Responses vary, so use the guidelines below to find a combination of treatments that work best for you. If your dosage of pain medication changes, you may also need to increase or decrease your daily dosage of laxative. Speak with your nurse to see if a change in your laxative dose is needed.

If you have been experiencing severe constipation (longer than 3 days without a bowel movement), take a dose of lactulose every four hours until you have a bowel movement. Your doctor will give you a prescription for this medication.

Once you have had a bowel movement, or to manage your bowel function while on pain medication, do the following:

1. Take two Senokot-S<sup>®</sup> tablets at bedtime with one tablespoon of Milk of Magnesia<sup>®</sup>.

The next day:

2. If you do not have a bowel movement in the morning, take two Senokot-S<sup>®</sup> tablets after breakfast with hot lemon water.
3. If you do not have a bowel movement by evening, take three Senokot-S<sup>®</sup> tablets at bedtime.

The next day:

4. If you do not have a bowel movement in the morning, take three Senokot-S<sup>®</sup> tablets after breakfast.
5. If you do not have a bowel movement by evening, take four Senokot-S<sup>®</sup> tablets at bedtime.

The next day:

6. If you do not have a bowel movement in the morning, take four Senokot-S<sup>®</sup> tablets after breakfast.

Once you start having bowel movements use the two steps before the last step that produced results as your daily laxative protocol. For example, if you had a bowel movement after step 4, then use steps 2 and 3 for your daily protocol. That means you would take two Senokot-S<sup>®</sup> in the morning and three Senokot-S<sup>®</sup> tablets at bedtime, as your daily regimen.

**(OVER)**

Senokot-S<sup>®</sup> can be purchased over the counter, without a prescription. If you find that Senokot-S<sup>®</sup> is too harsh, you may try other over the counter stool softeners, such as Colace<sup>®</sup> or Surfak<sup>®</sup>. Follow the label instructions for using these products, but usually taking at least one tablet twice a day is most effective.

**If there is no bowel movement within 24 hours after beginning this protocol, or if you are unsure about what to do, please call your doctor or nurse for additional instructions.**

**References:**

Aspen Publishers, Inc. Oncology Patient Education Manual. Gaithersburg, Maryland: First Edition 1194-2000.

www.plwc.org. 2001 ASCO Optimizing Cancer Care: The Importance of Symptom Management. May 2002

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