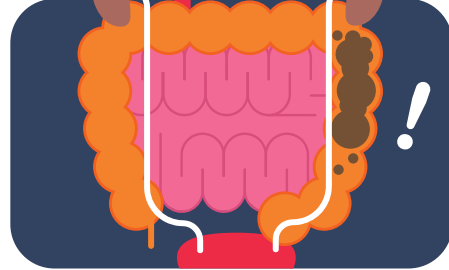


Patient presenting with Constipation



Over-the-counter conversations:

When responding to symptoms in the pharmacy, it is important to establish which medications a patient is taking. This is because:

- It could be a side effect to a medicine
- It could be a reason to stop a medicine
- It can influence the over-the-counter advice/treatments you can recommend

You may want to incorporate the following questions into your conversations:

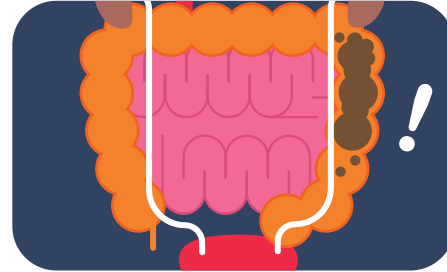
- Do you take any medicines prescribed by your GP?
- Are you on any treatment in/from the hospital?
- What condition do you have hospital treatment for?

**IF A PATIENT IS ON CANCER TREATMENT OR TREATMENT FROM THE HOSPITAL,
ALWAYS REFER TO YOUR PHARMACIST FOR FURTHER ASSESSMENT AND ADVICE.**

The full Let's Communicate Cancer course is available by clicking [here](#)

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Patient presenting with Constipation



Pharmacist Intervention:

Assess the symptom

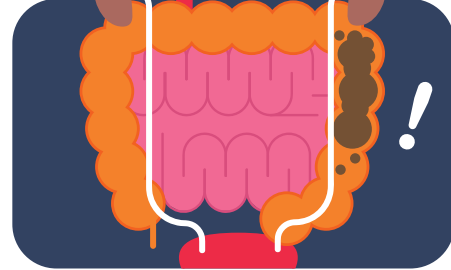
When assessing the patient's symptoms, it is important to try and address the following:

1. What type of cancer treatment they are receiving
 - Chemotherapy/Radiotherapy/Immunotherapy/Surgery
 - Route of administration - Oral/Injection/Infusion
2. Whether the symptom they are experiencing is a side effect that the hospital has made them aware of. Many hospitals will provide patients with written information regarding treatment and potential side effects
 - Certain chemotherapy agents and supportive medications e.g. ondansetron, opioids etc. can cause constipation
 - Patients who have had bowel, abdominal, gynaecological or urological surgery within the past 14 days should be referred back to their acute oncology support service to advise.
3. Has the hospital provided any advice or medicines on how to manage this side effect
 - Some treatment regimes with highly constipating agents in them may send patients home with supportive laxatives to use either regularly or when required
4. The outcome of following this advice or supportive medications to try and manage the side effect
 - Has the patient accessed any laxatives already?
Which ones?
How often?
Any improvement in symptoms?

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Patient presenting with Constipation



Pharmacist Intervention (continued)

Assess the severity of the symptoms

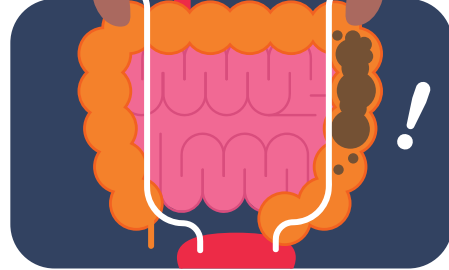
Ask patient about their normal frequency of opening bowels prior to starting cancer treatment and assess the severity (grade) of constipation they are experiencing using the table below:

Grade	0	1	2	3	4
Change from normal?	No change from normal bowel habits	Mild - no bowel movements for 24hrs over pre-treatment normal	Moderate - no bowel movement for 48hrs over pre-treatment normal	Severe - no bowel movement for 72hrs over pre-treatment normal	Severe - no bowel movement for >96hrs over pre-treatment normal
Action	OTC advice / treatment	OTC advice / treatment	If associated with abdominal pain and/or vomiting grade as severe, otherwise offer OTC advice/ treatment and refer to cancer team if no improvement in next 24hrs	Refer to cancer team	Refer to cancer team

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Patient presenting with Constipation



Advice and over the counter treatments which can be provided in the pharmacy **Grade 0-1/Grade 2**

- A stool softener (lactulose or docusate) and/or stimulant (senna) can be provided. Caution should be taken when recommending a stimulant if patient has had recent bowel/abdominal/gynaecological or urological surgery or they are at risk of bowel perforation from a large tumour burden within the bowel. Advise these patients to contact their Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) or the hospital "hotline" for further advice before taking any stimulant laxatives.
- Offer patient dietary advice e.g. leafy green vegetables, fruit, prune juice
- Encourage patient to increase fluid intake
- Referral from their doctor to a dietitian may also be considered

When to refer cross sector primary/secondary care **Grade 2/Grade 3-4**

Advise patient to contact their hospital,

- If they have grade 2 symptoms which do not improve after 24hrs
- if they develop sudden, severe abdominal pain and/or bloating
- if they suddenly start being sick

How to refer cross sector primary/secondary care

- Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) in hospital cancer care team
- 24-hour hospital cancer treatment "hotline"

Additional Support

Comprehensive information regarding individual cancers, or cancer treatments, is available from the **Macmillan website**

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