Bowel Function After Treatment For Bowel Cancer

Strategies To Help

Sonia Khatri
Colorectal Cancer CNC
Problems with bowel function after bowel surgery

More likely to experience

- Softer more frequent bowel motions

That may be accompanied by:

- Difficulty fully evacuating and/or
- Urgency with sometimes leakage of faeces
Problems with bowel function after bowel surgery

- The effects of surgery may be made worse during treatment with both chemotherapy and radiotherapy.
- Radiotherapy may have more lasting effects due to permanent changes it can cause to healthy tissue.
Bowel function after bowel surgery

- Bowel function is usually at its worst immediately after bowel surgery

- Often improves in the first few months
Strategies for improving bowel function

Slow down the time it takes for the bowel motion to move along the length of the bowel

- Diet – restrict foods that make the bowel motion too fast, too soft and gassy
- Soluble Fibre
- Medications
- Minimise stress
Strategies for improving bowel function

**DIET**

Identify those foods that make your bowel motions too fast, too soft and too gassy

- **Fruit** – grapes, stone fruits and most berries, includes dried
- **Vegetables** – all stimulate the bowel especially capsicum, cabbage, onions, beans, peas, corn, brussel sprouts and broccoli
- **Dietary Fibre (insoluble)** – wheat bran, seeds and other fibre found in high fibre breads and some breakfast cereals
Strategies for improving bowel function

DIET

- Spicy foods – chilli, garlic and curry stimulate bowel
- Caffeine – coffee, tea, chocolate drinks and energy drinks
- Alcohol – Beer and red wine
- Sugar free foods and drinks – may contain sorbitol which has a laxative effect
DO NOT REDUCE YOUR TOTAL FOOD AND FLUID INTAKE HOPING FOR REDUCTION IN LEAKAGE FROM THE BOWEL
Strategies for improving bowel function

Fibre
2 types of fibre

• **Insoluble** – speeds up bowel motions
  Useful for treatment of constipation.
  (fibrous veg – eg. carrots and celery)

• **Soluble** – turns to gel during digestion
  Can help firm/slow down motions
  (eg: Metamucil, Fybogel, Benefiber)
Strategies for improving bowel function

When taking any form of fibre, it is important to drink more water
Strategies for improving bowel function

**Medications**

Anti-diarrhoeal - slow colonic transit and dry out bowel motion

* Loperamide (Gastrostop/Immodium) – Take 30 mins before meals

* Lomotil

* Codeine Phosphate
Strategies for improving bowel function

- Excessive intake of anti-diarrhoeal medication can cause constipation

- Commence medications at low dosage and increase until satisfactory effect achieved
Strategies for improving bowel function

Numerous medications can cause diarrhoea

- Antibiotics
- Non steroidal – Naprosyn
- Metformin
- Colchicine
- Some antidepressants (Zoloft, Efexor, Cipramil)
Empty bowels more effectively

- Good toileting habits
  - Hold on until the urge is strong!!
Good Posture for Sitting on the Toilet

Knees higher than hips
Lean forward and put elbows on knees
Bulge abdomen
直en spine
Strategies for improving bowel function

Improve your ability to hold on

- Pelvic floor muscle training (Continence Foundation of Australia)
- Regular activity – gentle exercise such as walking at least 30 minutes most days
- Avoid activities which may worsen leakage (incontinence) like heavy lifting, squatting and strenuous physical activity if possible
Skin Care

Main causes of skin problems in perineal area (around back passage and genitalia)

- Excess moisture – wet pads, urine and faeces, perspiration
- Chemical irritation – urine and faeces, soaps, some skin care products (especially containing fragrances and alcohol)
- Mechanical damage – too much wiping/rubbing
Main Causes of Skin Problems

- Infection – by bacteria or fungi
- More prone to infection when skin is damaged by excess moisture, chemical or mechanical means
Skin Care

Main principles

- Gentle cleaning of the skin
- Preventing breaks in the skin or if skin damaged, helping skin to heal
Skin Care

- Clean with a PH-balanced product
- No soap (removes natural skin oils)
- No alcohol
- No fragrance

- Dry toilet paper and rough wash clothes can damage skin
- Try not to over wipe the area
Skin Care

- If skin is sore and/or bowel motions are soft
  - Use non-alcoholic baby wipes to gently cleanse area after each bowel motion

- Firming up the stool to reduce/prevent leakage
Skin Care

- Apply an moisturiser
- If skin is sore or there is leakage, use a protective barrier skin cream
- If skin is broken and there is frequent leakage, consider protective barrier film (alcohol free)
- Reduce perspiration in perineal area by wearing cotton underwear
Skin Care

- Various pads available to absorb leakage away from the skin surface
- Available from supermarket, pharmacy and suppliers
References:

“Improving Bowel Function after Bowel Surgery”
Australian Government Department of Health and Aging,
National Continence Management Strategy
Resources

- Continence Foundation of Australia
  www.continence.org.au

- National Continence Helpline
  Phone: 1800 33 00 66 (free call)

- The National Public Toilet Map
  www.toiletmap.gov.au
Any Questions?