

Constipation and Parkinson's Disease

One of the many challenges that face those living with Parkinson's disease is constipation. Constipation has many causes; many can be controlled by diet, fluid intake and activity. Other causes are due to medications or medication side-effects.

One issue that comes with Parkinson's disease is decreased gastric motility (the stomach and intestines do not move normally). This is due to the autonomic nervous system slowing down. This system is responsible for regulating smooth muscles. If the system is not working properly, then all other systems it works with will not work properly.

There are options available for Parkinson's disease patients. The options require change on the part of the patient and family members. The recommendations are simple. As the body adapts, the changes will make a difference. But, remember, the changes will take some time, up to 3 to 4 weeks.

Be patient, and avoid trying to solve the problem with the use of laxatives and enemas. Such products can cause worse constipation and can damage the lining of the intestines. Laxatives and enemas should be used as a last resort, and should be discussed with your physician.

Here is what you can do to help prevent constipation:

- Drink 6 to 8 8oz glasses of water every day.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol, as they can act as a diuretic.
- Increase daily fiber by eating more fruits and vegetables: 5 to 9 servings a day.
- Use bulking agents like Fibercon or Metamucil.
- Become more active. Increased activity also stimulates the intestines.
- Exercise regularly. Exercise helps your body and mind feel better.
- Move your bowels when you feel the urge.

If you are already dealing with constipation, here are some suggestions:

- Drink an additional 2 to 4 8oz. glasses of water.
- Try warm liquids, especially first thing in the morning.
- Add additional servings of fruits and vegetables to your diet.
- Eat prunes or bran cereal.
- Add a bulking agent like Fibercon or Metamucil.
- Exercise regularly.

Another means of dealing with constipation is Fruit Paste. This is an interim measure, and should only be used if the other methods have proven ineffective. Fruit Paste requires preparation. It can be stored in the freezer in old ice cube trays. Each cube is almost 2 tablespoons, and you only need to take 1 to 2 tablespoons per day.

Fruit Paste for Constipation

1 pound Pitted prunes
1 pound Raisins
1 cup lemon juice
1 pound dried Figs
1 cup brown sugar
3-4 oz pkg Senna Tea

Steep tea 5 minutes in 3 ½ cups water, strain. Add fruit to 2 cups tea, boil for 5 minutes. Add sugar and lemon juice, allow to cool. Blend in food processor. Keep in freezer. Take 1 to 2 tablespoons daily

Warning Signs every one needs to be aware of. If these occur, let your health care provider know:

- Constipation is a new issue for you.
- There is blood in your stool.
- You are losing weight without trying.
- You experience pain with your bowel movements.
- You have constipation that has lasted for more than 3 weeks.

Remember, certain situations can cause constipation: travel, stress, antacids, narcotic pain medications, and inactivity. When these are part of your life, use the recommendations listed to keep yourself happy, healthy and moving!