

# HOT TOPICS: Constipation

## CONSTIPATION CAN CAUSE DEATH:

Many vulnerable individuals die from the complications of constipation.

## What to WATCH for:



- Straining or grunting while attempting to have a bowel movement
- Frequent attempts or spending long periods of time attempting to have a bowel movement
- Bloating and/or stomach pain or discomfort
- Increased agitation or an increase in other behaviors
- Passing hard or small pieces of fecal material
- Refusing to eat or drink (later symptom)

## PREVENTION:



- GET PLENTY OF FLUIDS**
  - Provide lots of water and other clear liquids
  - Offer fluids frequently to individuals who are unable to make their needs known
    - Individuals with mobility restrictions
    - Individuals who are non-verbal
    - Anyone who cannot obtain fluids without assistance
  - Individuals with fluid restrictions/limits need their intake amounts adjusted for hot weather
    - Contact the individual's medical provider for adjustments
- CONTACT THE DOCTOR WHEN MEDICINES MAY BE CAUSING CONSTIPATION**
  - Many prescription and non-prescription medicines can cause constipation.
  - The following medications may cause or contribute to constipation:
    - Antidepressants
    - Antipsychotics
    - Narcotic Pain Medication
    - Antacids
    - Calcium and Iron Supplements
    - Certain Blood Pressure Medication
    - Cold Medicines (antihistamines)
- EAT A DIET RICH IN FIBER**
  - Fiber helps move waste through the intestines quickly
  - Provide a variety of fruits and vegetables for snacks and with meals
  - Serve whole grains in place of processed items (whole grain breads, cereals, crackers)
- MOVE BOWELS PROMPTLY**
  - Delaying or ignoring the urge to move your bowels causes constipation
  - Respond quickly to individuals asking to use toilet facilities
  - Establish toileting routines and schedules for individuals who cannot communicate their needs.
  - Keep track of bowel movements
  - Notify the doctor if there has been no bowel movement for three (3) days

## ACTION ITEMS:



- NOTIFY THE DOCTOR WHEN INDIVIDUAL HAS NO BOWEL MOVEMENT IN THREE (3) DAYS OR HAS THREE (3) BOWEL MOVEMENTS OR LESS PER WEEK**
- OBTAIN DOCTOR'S BOWEL CARE ORDERS, which may include:**
  - Medications to prevent constipation and promote regular bowel movements
  - Diet and Fluid recommendations
  - Medication Changes (when an individual's medicines may be causing constipation)



**IMMEDIATE URGENT CARE VISIT if individual has discomfort or pain; refusing food or fluids.  
CALL 9-1-1 IMMEDIATELY if vomit resembles digested foods and/or smells like feces.**