



## Managing constipation when taking pain medicines

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**About 3.2 million Australians have chronic pain. Opioid medicines may be used to manage moderate to severe pain.**

**A common side effect of opioid medicines is constipation. The right laxatives can help to manage constipation caused by these medicines.**

### What to do

- Talk to your doctor to find out if you are taking an opioid medicine.
- When starting an opioid medicine, talk to your doctor about how to prevent constipation.
- If you are taking an opioid medicine and constipation is a problem:
  - Talk to your doctor about how to treat constipation and which laxative to use.
  - Some other medicines, including those you can buy over-the-counter, can also cause constipation (for example antacids). A review of your medicines can help to identify these.
  - A healthy diet with the right amount of fibre and fluids, daily exercise, and good toilet habits can also help.

## Constipation and opioid medicines

Opioid medicines cause constipation by slowing down movement of the bowel, making stools hard, dry and difficult to pass.

Opioid medicines can come in many strengths and forms (including tablets, capsules, patches and liquids). These include medicines containing codeine such as Panadeine Forte® and Codapane Forte®.

Examples of opioid medicines for more severe chronic pain include:

- oxycodone (eg Oxycontin®)
- fentanyl (eg Durogesic®)
- morphine (eg MS Contin®).

## Ask your doctor about laxatives

When taking an opioid medicine, laxatives may be needed to increase the movement of the bowel. **To prevent the constipation, it is best to take a laxative when starting an opioid medicine.**

Although many laxatives are available to buy over-the-counter, some may worsen the constipation caused by opioid medicines. For example, fibre laxatives may not be suitable as they increase the size of the stool. Your doctor will help you decide which laxative to use.

**Always check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting any laxatives.**

## What else can you do about constipation?

### Aim for a healthy diet

A healthy diet, with the right amount of fibre and water, can also help. Check your daily fibre and fluid needs with your doctor.

### Exercise within your ability

Often it is difficult to exercise with chronic pain but even a little exercise can encourage bowel movements. If you can, take a daily walk. If you are in pain and finding it hard to move about or if you are confined to bed, a physiotherapist can help with suitable exercises.

### Good toilet habits

Use good toilet habits:

- go to the toilet as soon as you feel the urge
- if you are in a public place, use the public toilets instead of waiting until you get home
- relax and give yourself plenty of time to completely empty your bowel.

## For more information:

**Talk to your doctor and pharmacist.**