

# 5 Minute Consult: Constipation

## Daniel Markwalter, MD



PalliativeEM  
5 Minute Consult

### Management by Class of Agent



#### Fiber

- Bulk-forming with water → peristalsis
- Requires 8+ oz of fluid per dose
- Many OTC options, including:
  1. Psyllium (Metamucil®) 3.4 g powder or 2-6 caps PO qd-TID
  2. Methylcellulose (Citrucel®) 2 tabs PO qd (up to 12 tabs/day) or 1 scoop powder qd-TID



#### Stimulant Laxatives

- Irritant stimulates peristalsis
- Sennosides (Senokot®) 8.6 mg tabs 1-4 tabs PO qd-BID or liquid 8.8 mg/5 mL (max 40 mL/d)
- Bisacodyl (Dulcolax®) 5-15 mg 1-3 tabs PO qd-BID or 10 mg suppository qd



#### Osmotic Laxatives

- PEG (Miralax®) 17 g/cap 1 cap PO qd-8 doses/d (dissolve in 8 oz fluid)
  - Lactulose 10-20 g PO qd-TID
  - Sorbitol (70%) 15-60 mL PO qd-TID
  - Mg hydroxide (Milk of Mg®) 15-30 mL PO qd-TID (max 60 mL/d)\*
  - Mg cit 150-300 mL/d PO div qd-BID\*
- \*Avoid Mg products if CrCl <25 mL/min



#### Enemas

- Tap water or NS enema 500-1000 mL qd (watch for hyponatremia)
- Mineral oil enema 60-150 mL qd
- Sodium phosphate (Fleet®) 120 mL qd (avoid in older adults, renal disease)
- SMOG (saline, mineral oil, glycerin); check with institution



#### Lubricants

- Eases passage of stool
- Glycerin suppository 1 qd
- Mineral oil 30-60 mL PO qd (avoid prolonged use >1 week)



#### Alternatives and Adjuncts

- Manual disimpaction (always consider impaction before starting meds)
- Prune juice 120-140 mL PO qd-BID
- Metoclopramide for dysmotility 5-15 mg PO/SC/IV before meals
- Methylnaltrexone for opioid-induced
  1. <38 kg or >114 kg = 0.15 mg/kg SC qd
  2. 38-61 kg = 8 mg SC qd
  3. 62-114 kg = 12 mg SC qd

#### Pearls

- Assess for obstruction before treating as constipation
- No evidence supporting the use of docusate (Colace®)
- May need cleanout in ED with disimpaction/enema but recommend combining agents of different classes for scheduled home regimen (commonly PEG + sennosides); consider Miralax taper (starting at 6-8 doses/d) prior to maintenance
- Remember non-pharmacologic factors (e.g. encourage mobility, schedule BMs, rectal stimulation for neurologic causes)
- Beware of gas/bloating as side effect from fiber and osmotic laxatives

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### References

1. Adapted from: Bodtke A and Ligon K. *Hospice and Palliative Medicine Handbook: A Clinical Guide*. 2016.
2. Icons from Lars Meierberens, Foodicons Collection, Eucalyp, Chad Remsing, Naufal Hudallah, Alvaro Bueno, and atlantamountain of the Noun Project.