Some pain medicines (opioids) can make you constipated. Being constipated is when you only have a bowel movement (BM) about two times a week. **Opioid-induced constipation (OIC) is a different type of constipation. Up to half of all people taking long-term pain medicines develop OIC.** Constipation can develop soon after you begin taking pain medicines. The risk for OIC increases the longer you take pain medicines. OIC is not a side effect that will go away with continued use. This leaves many patients on long-term pain medicines in need of treatment for constipation.

**Know the basics:**
- Opioids block pain signals, but they can also block activity in the bowel.
- OIC is one of the most common side effects of opioids.
- OIC can last for as long as you’re taking opioids to manage your chronic pain.

**Here’s what you can do to help your constipation:**
*Talk to your doctor or nurse before making any of the below changes*
- Drink at least eight glasses of water every day.
- Do not eat foods with an excess of fat.
- Do not eat foods with an excess of sugar.
- Walk or exercise at least 30 minutes a day.

**When You Get the Urge – GO!**
- When you feel like you need to go to the bathroom, go!
- Don’t hold it until you get home.
Signs it may be time to talk to your doctor or nurse about OIC:

- Hard stools: The appearance of your stool is an important clue to your digestive health. Dry, hard stools are a good indicator of constipation.
- Decreased number of BMs: Many patients taking opioid medications experience a decreased number of BMs, which may be an indicator of OIC.
- Feeling of incomplete evacuation: If you are using the restroom often but do not feel you are having complete BMs, this could be a symptom of OIC.

It is important for people taking long-term opioid therapy to have a plan to minimize constipation and keep bowels regular. Your doctor should prescribe you a laxative with or without a stool softener.

**Laxatives** – senna (Senekot), bisacodyl (Dulcolax), magnesium hydroxide (Milk of Magnesia (MOM)) or polyethylene glycol (Miralax)

**Stool softeners** – docusate (Colace, Surfak)

References