MANAGING CHEMOTHERAPY SIDE EFFECTS: CONSTITUTION

WHAT IS CONSTITUTION?
Hard stool or difficult bowel movements, bowel movements that are less often than what is usual for you.

WHAT COMMON CAUSES OF CONSTITUTION?
- Low fiber diet.
- Not drinking enough fluids.
- Being less active than usual.
- Not going to the bathroom when you feel the urge.
- Overuse of laxatives.
- Drugs (pain medication, antidepressants, tranquilizers, iron supplements, some anti nausea medication, vincristine, and vinblastine).

WHAT CAN I DO?
- Eat dietary fiber, such as whole grain breads and cereals, oatmeal, wheat bran, wheat germ, legumes (peas and beans), root vegetables (carrots and potatoes with skin), fruits (pears, apples, cantaloupe), dried fruits (raisins, dates, prunes) seeds and nuts.
- Drink warm fluids (tea, coffee, a squeeze of lemon juice in warm water); use milk products in moderation.
- Include mild exercise, especially walking, in your daily activity.
- Respond to your body’s urge. Over time, if this urge is ignored, it will go away and constipation is the result. Allow yourself time and privacy. If you have a raised toilet seat, use a footstool, as squatting and leaning over is the normal position to aid in passing bowels.
- If you are on medication that causes constipation, take the laxatives as they are prescribed for you. Discuss any changes with your nurse or doctor.

WHEN SHOULD I CALL MY NURSE OR DOCTOR?
- If no bowel movement occurs within 3 days after taking prescribed laxatives.
- If when constipated, you develop fever or vomiting or crampy abdominal pain or bloating or are unable to pass gas.