

Laxative guidelines for care home residents

Definition: Passage of hard stools less frequently than the person's own normal pattern. It is important for people who complain of constipation to understand that bowel habit can vary considerably in frequency without doing harm.

Laxatives should generally be avoided except where straining will make a condition worse (such as angina) or increase the risk of rectal bleeding (e.g. with haemorrhoids). Excessive laxative use can cause electrolyte disturbances; inadequate fluid intake with osmotic laxatives can cause wind and intestinal obstruction. Before laxatives are prescribed, constipating medication should be reviewed, and doses adjusted if possible.

Some drugs that may cause constipation

- antacids (containing aluminium or calcium)
- antimuscarinics (e.g. oxybutynin, tolterodine)
- antidepressants (e.g. amitriptyline)
- antiepileptics
- sedating antihistamines (e.g. chlorphenamine)
- antipsychotics
- antispasmodics (e.g. dicycloverine, hyoscine)
- calcium supplements
- diuretics
- iron supplements
- opioids (e.g. codeine, buprenorphine)
- verapamil

Lifestyle – may take up to a month for full effect and must be continued throughout laxative therapy


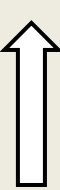
Diet: increase fibre, gradually aiming for 18-30 g fibre a day

Fluid: at least 1.5-2L a day (aim for 6-8 glasses)

Increase physical activity

Encourage person to be upright and mobile as much as possible

Encourage person to visit the toilet 20 minutes after a meal

Start at the top and with drug choice from table below.		Chronic (frail elderly)	Drug induced		Remove stimulant first and then reduce from the last step when controlled
		Osmotic**	Stimulant***		
		Softener	Softener		
		Stimulant***	Osmotic**		

**should be taken regularly

***short term use 2-4 weeks; can be taken prn

Local cost-effective drug of choice and standard recommended dose

Osmotic	2-3 days to effect	Laxido sachets 1-2 daily or lactulose 15ml twice daily. Osmotic laxatives need to be taken every day to be effective, not 'prn'.
Softener	12-72 hours to effect	Docusate capsules 100mg up to 500mg in daily divided doses
Stimulant (2-4 weeks)	8-12 hours to effect	Sennoside syrup 7.5mg/5ml 10-20ml nocte Bisacodyl 5mg ec tablets