

PIPC Handout September 25, 2012

## Constipation

- No bowel movements for a period of time longer than usual for you.
  - If you normally have a bowel movement every 3 days, then not having one for 5 days may be a sign that you are constipated. Or if you have a bowel movement every day, not having one may be a sign that you are constipated.
- When you do have a bowel movement, it may be small and hard.

## Pregnancy and constipation

- The hormone production that happens during pregnancy will slow down the movement of the large intestine.
- The growing baby also puts pressure on your body, which will slow your intestines further.
- Slow intestine movement will increase the amount of days between bowel movements. It also will cause your body to absorb more water, making your bowel movements small and hard.

## Recommendations for relief

- Drink at least 8 glasses of fluids a day.
- When you feel a bowel movement is coming, try your best to get to a bathroom right away; waiting may make the symptoms worse.
- The use of stool softeners may help, but contact a physician first to find one that is right for you.
- Get enough fibre and exercise.

## Fibre

- There are two types of fibre: soluble and insoluble
- Soluble fibre: stays in the intestines and helps to form your bowel movements keeping them soft and moist.
  - Fibre from fruits and legumes contain soluble fibre.
- Insoluble fibre: fibre your body cannot digest.
  - Fibre from grains and vegetables do not dissolve, but add bulk to your bowel movement and speeds up the movement through your intestine.
- You should get 25 grams (g) of fibre per day.
- This is about 8-10 food items with 2-4 g of fibre in them.
- Slowly increase you're the amount of fibre you eat daily and increase the amount of fluids you drink along with the amount of fibre you eat.

## Exercise

- Important to keep your body moving.
- During exercise your intestines will move, causing your bowels to move, which lowers your risk for constipation.

### Tips

- If you have been not been very active, start doing mild exercises, like walking and swimming. Start with 5 minutes and slowly increase the amount of time you spend exercising to 30 minutes a day.
  - During your exercise you should be able to carry a normal conversation.
- Drink lots of water before, during and after physical activity.
- If you have been active talk to your doctor about your exercise plan and if you can continue with it during your pregnancy.
- Weight training is generally safe as long as the resistance is light to moderate.
- As your pregnancy progresses, talk to your doctor about your program and the exercises you should be doing.

## Hemorrhoids

- Swollen varicose veins in the rectum.
- Caused by straining hard while having a bowel movement.
- Avoiding bowel movement due to pain can make the hemorrhoids worse. It becomes harder and more painful to have a bowel movement the longer you hold it.
- If you have hemorrhoids, talk to your doctor about how to manage them.

(adapted from: Thompson, Manore, Sheeska (2007). Nutrition an Functional approach. Pearson: Toronto)