



PATIENT / FAMILY TEACHING SHEET

Managing Bowel Incontinence

What is Bowel Incontinence?

- Not being able to control a bowel movement from the rectum
- Bowel incontinence has many causes. Some of these include
 - Weakness of the anal muscle
 - Not moving around
 - Nervous system disorders
 - Mental confusion
- Other factors include
 - Long-term use of laxatives
 - Not enough fluid intake
 - Lack of exercise
 - Hemorrhoids
 - Sedation
 - Very hard stool
- Severe constipation may lead to leakage from the rectum

· What are the Signs and Symptoms?

- Losing control of a bowel movement
- Blockage of bowel contents. Symptoms may include
 - Nonstop oozing of loose stools
 - Loss of appetite
 - Cramping

· What to Report to the Hospice/Palliative Care

Team

- Color, looseness and odor of the stool
- Abdominal discomfort, cramping or bloating
- Medications and diet history
- Changes in activity level
- Skin problems of the affected area
- Patient and caregiver's thoughts

· What can be done for Bowel Incontinence?

- Know the patient's bowel history. Know the usual routine. Time of day, following a meal, etc.
- Plan a bowel retraining program that is easy. It should fit into the patient's lifestyle
 - Take in enough fluids and fiber if possible
 - Provide ample time and privacy during toileting
 - Keep skin clean and dry to prevent break down and odors. Avoid baby powder and cornstarch
 - Wear loose fitting clothing to allow for air flow
 - Control odors with fresh air and room deodorizers
 - Wear protective garments
 - Avoid foods that can act as laxatives. These include caffeine, alcohol, diet soda or artificial sweeteners
 - Talk to your nurse for ideas for more information

Other HPNA Patient / Family Teaching Sheets are available at www.hpna.org.

Reference

Bates-Jensen BM. Skin disorders: pressure ulcers – assessment and management. In: Ferrell BR, Coyle N, eds. *Textbook of Palliative Nursing*. 2nd ed.

New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2006: 301-328.

Karinski M. *Quick Tips for Caregivers*. Medford, OR: Healing Arts Communication; 2000. Available at mayoclinic.com/health/fecal-incontinence/DS00477.

Approved by the HPNA Education Committee September 2007.