

Step-by-Step Guide for Bowel Care after Surgery

Opioids and constipation: What you need to know

Opioid medications are regularly prescribed after surgery to help manage pain.

Some common opioids include:

- Percocet (oxycodone/acetaminophen)
- Roxicodone (oxycodone)
- Norco (hydrocodone/acetaminophen)
- Dilaudid (hydromorphone)
- Ultram (tramadol)

Opioids are usually safe when used exactly as ordered by your doctor, but they do have many side effects. One major side effect is **constipation (can't poop)**. This is caused by opioids slowing down the movement of your bowels. About 6 out of every 10 people who take opioids after surgery have constipation.



It's important to prevent constipation following surgery to prevent having to go back to the hospital or to the emergency room. **This step-by-step guide** can help you trigger a bowel movement (BM) and stay regular while taking opioids. Continue to follow your bowel care plan until you are done taking opioids, you have regular bowel movements without treatment, or you get diarrhea.

Regardless of what bowel care step you are on, you should:



Try standing and moving for 1 minute each hour and work up to walking 30 minutes a day.



Drink plenty of fluids (32 to 64 ounces every day).



Limit taking opioids as you can. Ask your care team about other ways to help control pain.

Keeping track

Use this table to keep track of your bowel movements. Write down the dates and times of each bowel movement below. This can help you decide which bowel care step you need.

My bowel movements

Date	Time	Date	Time

Getting things moving

Follow these steps to find relief and prevent constipation while taking opioids following surgery. The medications for constipation on this list are available over-the-counter at most drug or grocery stores.

STEP 1 GET THINGS MOVING

1

TAKE 1 capful or packet of **Miralax** (polyethylene glycol) mixed with at least 8 ounces of water or juice **2 times** daily, **AND/OR**

TAKE 1 tablet of **Senna-S** (sennosides / docusate) **2 times** daily.

- Once you are regular, you may adjust as needed (for example, stop Senna-S and continue Miralax).
- If you don't have a BM for a total of 3 days, move to Step 2.

STEP 2 KEEP THINGS MOVING

2

INCREASE Senna-S to 2 tablets **2 times** daily, **AND CONTINUE Miralax**, taking 1 capful or packet mixed with at least 8 ounces of water or juice **2 times** daily

- Once you are regular, you may adjust as needed.
- If you don't have a BM for a total of 5 days, begin Step 3.

STEP 3 REALLY GET THINGS MOVING

3

ADD 1 dose (30 ml), of **Milk of Magnesia** (magnesium hydroxide).

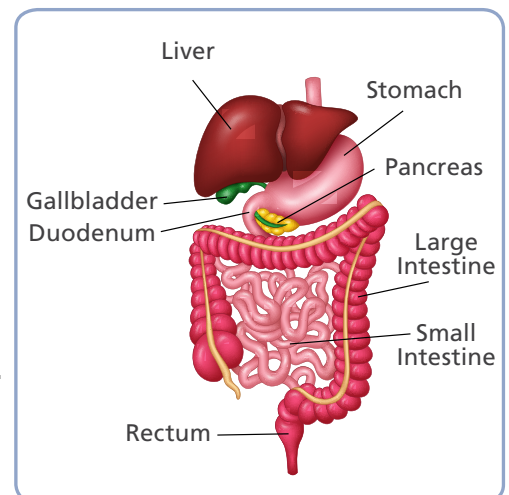
- If you are able to have a BM return to Step 2 until you are done using opioids or you have constipation or diarrhea.
If you don't have a BM within 8 hours,

ADD 1 tablet (10 mg) of **Dulcolax** (bisacodyl) **OR**
1 rectal suppository.

- If you are able to have a bowel movement return to Step 2.
- If you don't have a BM,

TAKE another dose of **Milk of Magnesia** and **1** tablet of **Dulcolax**.

- If you are able to have a BM return to Step 2.
- If you don't have a BM or have continued symptoms, move to Step 4.



STEP 4 REALLY, REALLY GET THINGS MOVING

4

TAKE ½ to 1 bottle of **magnesium citrate**

- Once you finally have a BM, return to Step 2
- If you don't have a bowel movement while you are using opioids or symptoms of constipation continue, call your doctor.

NOTE: Each person's bowels work differently, so you may need to adjust your treatment. If you have severe cramping, a bloated and tight belly, watery diarrhea, rectal bleeding, severe belly pain or discomfort, and/or black tarry stool, contact your doctor immediately and seek medical attention.

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