Why Does Ovarian Cancer Cause Constipation and What Can Be Done?

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Coping With Ovarian Cancer Constipation

If you've recently been diagnosed with ovarian cancer, it may have taken a while to receive a diagnosis. According to the American Cancer Society, symptoms of ovarian cancer typically do not present themselves until the cancer has spread beyond the ovaries.

Even if you had symptoms earlier on in the disease state, the symptoms are sometimes vague, making it difficult to diagnose.

One of the symptoms of ovarian cancer is constipation. Unfortunately, this symptom is all too common with many women and can be brushed under the carpet easily by our physician. Even if your bowel habits are fairly regular, our doctor's may simply tell us to eat more fiber or add Metamucil to our daily routine.

During treatment of cancer in general, constipation is an often-reported side effect. Please continue reading for a discussion of home treatment of constipation during cancer treatment.

Ovarian Cancer and Constipation

Constipation during the treatment of ovarian cancer can be caused by a multitude of things. It may be caused by the disease process itself, it could be caused by the chemotherapy that is used to kill the cancer, or the pain medication used to treat the discomfort associated with the cancer.

We're often more sedentary during cancer treatment, so constipation could be exacerbated by inactivity. As with our diet during any time of life, nutrition could also play a role.

Tips for Treating Ovarian Cancer Constipation

There are several ways to treat constipation at home before resorting to medication:

- **Ensure that you are taking in the correct amount of fluids.** For most people, eight to 10 eight-ounce glasses is adequate. If you have kidney or heart failure, your doctor may recommend a decreased amount of fluids. Fluid intake can also come from soups and popsicles.
- **Add more fiber to your diet.** High-fiber foods include fruits, vegetables, whole-grain breads and cereals, nuts and prunes.
- **Avoid constipating foods.** These include foods like cheese and bananas.
- **Eat meals at the same times each day.** This may help to regulate bowel movements.
- **Incorporate exercise into your routine.** This of course depends on if your doctor allows it.
- **If tube feedings (enteral) are required, request a formulation that has increased fiber.**

- **Schedule a time each day for a bowel movement.** Incorporating this into the daily routine may be helpful.

If these tips are not helpful, moving towards over-the-counter medications may be helpful (with your doctor's permission, of course!):

- Add a daily stool softener, such as Colace.
- Add a synthetic fiber, such as Metamucil or Citrucel, daily.

If adding a stool softener or a synthetic fiber is not effective, adding a laxative may be required. Laxatives include Phillip's Milk of Magnesia and Miralax. Do not use laxatives without the advice or your physician.

When to Call Your Doctor

It is wise to call your doctor if you have any worries about your constipation. However, you should call your doctor for any of the following:

- Constipation that persist longer than one week
- Chronic constipation
- Rectal pain
- Blood in the stool
- Abdominal pain, especially if a fever accompanies it
- Stool leakage