

## **Constipation in Individuals with Eating Disorders**

Gastrointestinal symptoms, including constipation, are a common symptom of disordered eating. Constipation can be defined as the presence of symptoms such as discomfort, abdominal pain, rectal pain and hard stools.

Constipation often occurs in individuals with eating diorders due to; decreased food and fluid intake, decreased fibre intake, lack of exercise, laxative abuse, weakness of the smooth muscle of the bowel and potassium and magnesium deficiences.

The use of stimulant laxatives in patients with eating disorders should be avoided whenever possible.

Assess and treat the reasons for constipation

If bowel NOT impacted or blocked

If bowel impacted or blocked, clear with enema



- Reintroduce regular meals. Small frequent meals may be better tolerated.
  - Adjust fibre intake.
  - Encourage fluid intake.
  - Increase weight, if weight gain is required.

Encourage light physical activity if appropriate

- Daily physical activity will help to stimulate peristalsis. The amount and intensity of exercise must be agreed by the team and balanced against the need to conserve energy if weight gain is a goal.
- With the introduction of exercise, the dietician should be consulted to determine additional nutrition requirements.

If constipation does not resolve, use a hydrophilic bulk-forming agent