

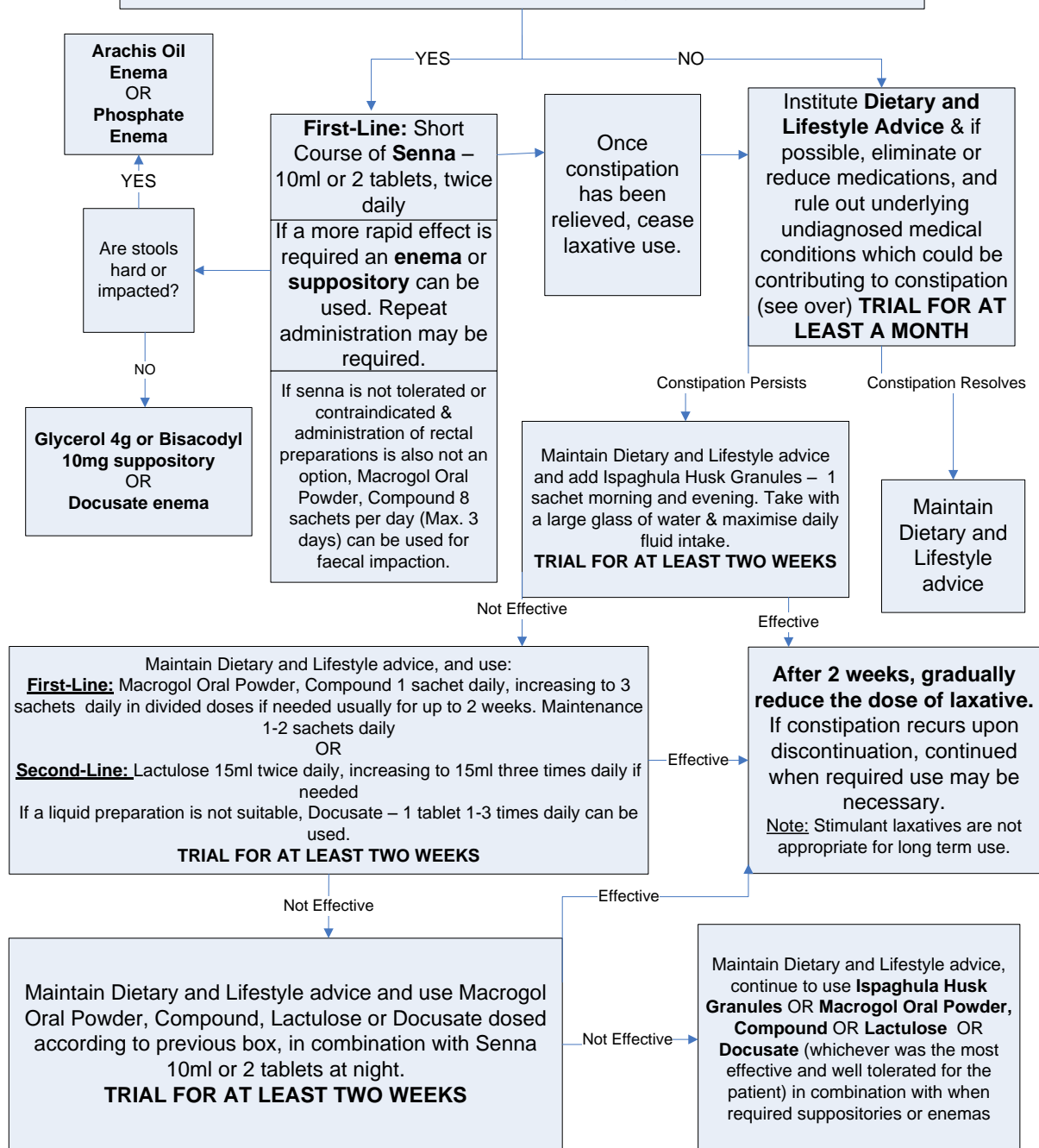
## Adult Constipation Guidelines (≥ 16 years)

Please note information overleaf which is important for correct use of this flowchart.

Refer to contraindications and precautions in product information before use of any agent. Symptoms such as severe abdominal pain, nausea & vomiting may indicate intestinal obstruction, which precludes the use of laxatives.

These guidelines are not intended for use for the management of constipation in palliative care or oncology settings

### Is Constipation Acute & requiring immediate relief?



## WHAT IS CONSTIPATION?

Most people have bowel movements at least three times a week. However there is a wide variety of normal bowel habits, and some people have bowel movements more than once a day. Constipation is when the frequency of defecation has decreased in relation to an individual's normal bowel habits and stools are harder and more difficult to pass. The diagnosis of constipation should be made according to clinical assessment and rectal examination.

Details of bowel habit and consistency of bowel movements (as per the Bristol Stool Chart) should be documented in each patient's records.

## DIETARY AND LIFESTYLE ADVICE:

Increase fluid (aim to drink at least 2L per day)\* and fibre intake (wheat bran, prunes, baked beans, fruit, vegetables, cereals, wholemeal bread), decrease dairy products if intake is high (intake should still remain sufficient to maintain adequate calcium intake), avoid caffeine and alcohol which can dehydrate, increase physical activity and go to the toilet after meals when the gastrocolic reflex is maximal.

\*In some patients with certain medical conditions such as heart, kidney or liver failure, fluid intake may need to be kept to a minimum.

**SOME UNDERLYING UNDIAGNOSED MEDICAL CONDITIONS WHICH MAY BE CONTRIBUTING TO CONSTIPATION:** hypothyroidism, Parkinson's disease, depression, multiple sclerosis, hypercalcaemia, mechanical obstruction or other neurologic or gastrointestinal disorders.

**SOME MEDICATIONS WHICH CAN CAUSE CONSTIPATION:** Opioids (e.g. codeine, morphine), Drugs which have anticholinergic properties (eg. Tricyclic antidepressants, sedating antihistamines, antipsychotics, some antiparkinsonian drugs including L-Dopa, calcium channel blockers (especially verapamil), iron, calcium supplements, diuretics.

Note: For opioid induced constipation, lactulose with senna is the preferred laxative. It should be commenced at the same time the opioid is started and usually needs to be used long-term for the duration of opioid use. Refer to NHS Ayrshire and Arran Managed Clinical Network guideline for the Management of Constipation in Palliative Care Patients (adults) for further information

**ACUTE CONSTIPATION:** Rapid acting laxatives are required. Senna works in ~ 6-12 hours, Enemas work in ~ 15 minutes and Suppositories work in ~ 30 minutes. Enemas are more effective at clearing constipation occurring higher in the rectum.

**Note that after a thorough evacuation of the colon, several days may elapse before a normal bowel movement can occur. This is normal, and should not be mistaken for persisting constipation.**

Notes regarding specific laxatives:

**Arachis oil enemas:** are contraindicated in patients with peanut or soya allergy.

**Phosphate enemas:** should not be used in patients with severe renal impairment (GFR < 30ml/min) as they can lead to hyperphosphataemia in these patients.

**Ispaghula Husk Granules:** Bulk forming laxatives can sometimes be not as effective in the elderly who are constipated as a result of decreased mobility which consequently increases gastrointestinal transit time.

**Lactulose:** In approximately 20% of patients using full doses, flatulence and bloating can occur. This is particularly a problem when therapy is initiated.

**Macrogol Oral Powder, Compound:** Brands available include Laxido® and Movicol®. For faecal impaction 8 sachets should be dissolved in 1 litre of water and drunk within 6 hours. Patients with cardiovascular impairment should not take more than 2 sachets in any 1 hour