

Preventing Constipation

Signs of constipation are bowel movements that are difficult, painful or less frequent than is normal for you.

Constipation may occur because of:

- poor fluid intake
- emotional stress
- certain illnesses
- a low fiber diet
- lack of exercise
- failure to respond to the urge
- medications, especially those used for pain control or depression
- chemotherapy treatments

Often, constipation is relieved once fiber and fluids are combined with exercise.

General Guidelines

The following guidelines will help prevent constipation.

Time

Set aside the same time each day to have a bowel movement, especially after breakfast. Respond to the urge right away. You may have to strain if you wait; something you need to avoid if you have a heart condition.

Exercise

Exercise each day. Walking is great for you. If you are on bed rest, ask if you may do some light exercises in bed.

Fiber

Unless told otherwise, try to include five servings a day of fruits and vegetables because they naturally contain fiber. Raw fruits and vegetables with their skins are your best choice. Eat whole-grain cereals such as bran or shredded wheat.

Add fiber to your diet slowly. If you add too much fiber too quickly, you could have discomfort due to gas and bloating. Once you have added the fiber to your diet, be sure to allow a few weeks for mild gas to subside.

The fiber found in wheat bran, whole grain cereals and breads, corn bread, granola and vegetables and fruits with skin may be the most helpful in preventing constipation. Bananas, oat bran and potatoes (except the skin) are less helpful in the relief of constipation but may help lower blood sugar in people with diabetes and cholesterol.

Eat fiber-rich foods every day to maintain regularity. Beginning on page four, you will find a list of some fiber-rich foods. Unless told otherwise, 25-30 grams of fiber every day are suggested.

Fluids

Drink more fluids; at least 8-10 glasses a day. Drinking a warm beverage after a meal may naturally stimulate the urge to have a bowel movement. When you increase the fiber in your diet, you need to drink more fluids since fiber helps relieve and prevent constipation only when you drink enough fluids. As you get older, your body may not tell you to drink enough fluids and you may need to remind yourself to drink plenty of fluids each day. If you only drink when you are thirsty, you may not be drinking enough to help the fiber work for you.

Medications and Treatments

Often, constipation is relieved once fiber and fluids are combined with exercise.

If constipation persists, your doctor, pharmacist or nurse can suggest the best way to treat the problem. Below is a partial list of medicines used to treat constipation and the actions and cautions for each type of medicine are highlighted. If you have any questions about these or any other medications, please ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

Take all medications as directed. Some types of laxatives may be habit-forming and all can affect the way other medications work. Be sure to talk with your doctor or pharmacist before taking laxatives with any other medicines.

WARNING: Do NOT take ANY laxative product if you have cramps, nausea, vomiting or abdominal pain.

Bulk Forming Laxatives

These products are often the most helpful of all the laxatives in combination with diet, fluids and exercise.

Examples: Metamucil,[®] Fibercon,[®] Citrucel[®]

Action: Adds bulk to the stool and pushes the stool forward, promotes a “normal” bowel movement.

Caution: These agents have very few side effects. However, do not take these laxatives at the same time as you take other medications. You must drink additional fluids with these laxatives and should not take them before meals.

Stool Softeners

Examples: Colace,[®] Surfak[®]

Action: Keeps stool soft and easier to pass.

Caution: Generally, these agents provide the least effect and may take several days to soften the stool. **Do NOT take these agents with any other medications.** Take only on the advice of your doctor.

Mineral Oil

Take this only if advised by your doctor.

Stimulants

Examples: Dulcolax,[®] Senekot,[®] Ex-Lax[®]

Action: Causes the bowel wall to contract.

Caution: These agents can be used if bulk forming laxatives have no effect. You should check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist before taking them. These agents are the most habit forming and should not be taken every day. Do not take with milk products. These may cause cramps and abdominal pain. Also, results may come on without warning.

Stool Softener and Stimulant Combined

Examples: Peri-colace,[®] Doxidan,[®] Dialose Plus[®]

Action: Softens hard stool and stimulates bowel wall.

Caution: May be habit forming and cause cramps. Take only on the advice of your doctor.

Osmotic Laxatives

Examples: Lactulose,[®] Golytely,[®] Milk of Magnesia,[®] Sorbitol[®]

Action: Keeps water in the bowel to soften stool.

Caution: Results may come on without warning. May cause gas, diarrhea and cramping. Take only on the advice of your doctor.

Enema

Example: Fleets[®]

Action: Direct softening and stimulation of stool in the rectum.

Caution: This treatment usually produces quick results. Take only on the advice of your doctor since this treatment may interact with certain cardiac medications and may alter your electrolyte balance.

Suppository

Examples: Glycerin,[®] Dulcolax[®]

Action: Direct softening and stimulation in the rectum.

Caution: Take only on the advice of your doctor. This treatment may be habit forming and cause cramps.

Fiber-Rich Foods

Fruit	Portion Size	DietaryFiber (grams)
Watermelon	1 cup	0.3g
Cantaloupe	1 cup	0.5g
Peach	1 medium	0.5g
Orange	1/2 cup	1.3g
Applesauce	1/2 cup	1.4g
Raisins	1/4 cup	1.5g
Banana	1 medium	1.6g
Grapefruit	1/2 medium	1.7g
Pineapple, canned	1 cup	1.9g
Grapes	1 cup	2.6g
Strawberries	1 cup	2.8g
Papaya	1 medium	2.8g
Blackberries	1 medium	3.3g
Apple	1 medium	3.5g
Pear	1 medium	4.1g
Dates	10 dates	4.2g
Blueberries	1/2 cup	4.4g
Raspberries	1 cup	5.8g

Cereal	Portion Size	DietaryFiber (grams)
General Mills Trix	1 cup	0g
Kellogg's Special K	1 cup	1g
Corn Flakes	1 cup	1g
Cream of Wheat, cooked	1 cup	1g
Kellogg's Product 19	1 cup	1g
Wheat Germ	2 tablespoons	2g
Quaker Instant Oatmeal	1 packet	3g
Kellogg's Just Right	1 cup	3g
Wheaties	1 cup	3g

Continued

Cereal	Portion Size	DietaryFiber (grams)
General Mills Basic4	1 cup	3g
Cheerios/Multi-grain Cheerios	1 cup	3g
Kellogg's Low Fat Granola	2/3 cup	3g
Nutra Grain Flakes with Raisins	1 cup	4g
Quaker Oats, dry	1/2 cup	4g
Post Fruit and Fiber	1 cup	4g
Healthy Choice Multigrain Cereal with Oat Clusters and Raisins	1 cup	4g
Grape Nuts	1/2 cup	5g
Post Bran'nola	1/2 cup	5g
Total Raisin Bran	1 cup	5g
Post Raisin Bran	1 cup	8g
100% Bran	1/3 cup	8g
Kellogg's All Bran	1/2 cup	10g
Kellogg's All Bran with Extra Fiber	1/2 cup	15g

Vegetables	Portion Size	DietaryFiber (grams)
Lettuce, Iceberg	1 leaf	0.2g
Zucchini	1 cup	0.3g
Cabbage	1 cup	0.4g
Cucumber	1 cup	0.6g
Tomato	1 medium	1g
Green Beans	1 cup	1.1g
Cauliflower	2 cups	2g
Broccoli	1 cup	2g
Brussels Sprouts	1 cup	2.2g
Winter Squash	1 cup	2.4g
Corn	1 cup	3.4g

Continued

Vegetables	Portion Size	DietaryFiber (grams)
Mixed Vegetables (canned/frozen)	1 cup	4.2g

Dried Beans and Peas	Portion Size	DietaryFiber (grams)
Black Eye Peas	1/2 cup	2.2g
Navy Beans	1/2 cup	3.3g
Pork-n-Beans/Baked Beans	1/2 cup	3.5g
Pinto Beans	1/2 cup	3.4g
Black Beans	1/2 cup	3.6g
Lentils	1/2 cup	3.9g
Lima Beans	1/2 cup	3.9g
Great Northern Beans	1/2 cup	4.9g
Vegetarian Refried Beans	1/2 cup	6g
Garbonzo Beans (Chick Peas)	1/2 cup	6g
Kidney Beans	1/2 cup	7.3g

Others		
Microwave Popcorn	1/3 bag	5g
Tofu	1/2 cup	3.9g

*Developed by:
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