

## Treating Constipation

Constipation is when you have bowel movements that are difficult, painful or less often than is normal for you.

Constipation can happen for these reasons:

- Not drinking enough fluids
- Lack of exercise
- Chemotherapy treatments
- Emotional stress
- Medications
- Some illnesses
- Low fiber diet
- Pain medications

### General guidelines

The following guidelines will help prevent constipation. **For most people, having a bowel movement every 2 to 3 days will prevent discomfort.**

#### **Exercise**

Exercise can reduce fatigue and improve your overall mood. As you are able, include exercise as part of your daily routine. Exercise alone will not **reverse** constipation from pain medications.

#### **Fluids**

Drink at least 8 to 10 glasses of fluids each day. 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. Once again, this alone will not treat constipation from pain medication.

While the above methods may be helpful, they may not work well when constipation is caused by pain medications. Your physician, pharmacist or nurse can suggest the best way to treat the problem.

#### **Fiber**

Fruits, vegetables and whole grains are part of a healthy diet. They contain fiber, which may help prevent constipation. Try to eat 25 to 35 grams of fiber per day.

Choose foods that have at least 3 grams of fiber per serving. You can increase fiber in your diet slowly over a few weeks.

To increase your fiber intake.

- Eat fruits and vegetables with the peels and skins on
- Choose whole grain foods
- Add beans to your diet

When choosing whole grain foods, look for foods with 100% whole wheat, rye, oats or bran as the 1st or 2nd ingredient on the food nutrition label.

Prune juice also stimulates the bowel and may help with chronic constipation. Try taking 1/2 to 1 cup serving of prune juice or dried prunes each day.

Try to include some of these high-fiber foods in your diet.

Food	Amount	Total fiber in grams (g)
Bran cereal	1/2 cup	8.6 g
Cooked kidney beans	1/2 cup	7.9 g
Cooked lentils	1/2 cup	7.8 g
Cooked black beans	1/2 cup	7.6 g
Canned chickpeas	1/2 cup	5.3 g
Baked beans	1/2 cup	5.1 g
Pear	1	5.1 g
Soybeans	1/2 cup	5.1 g
Quinoa	1/2 cup	5 g
Baked sweet potato, with skin	1 medium	4.8 g
Baked potato, with skin	1 medium	4.4 g
Cooked frozen green peas	1/2 cup	4.4 g
Bulgar	1/2 cup	4.1 g
Cooked frozen mixed vegetables	1/2 cup	4 g
Raspberries	1/2 cup	4 g
Blackberries	1/2 cup	3.8 g
Almonds	1 oz	3.5 g
Cooked spinach	1/2 cup	3.5 g
Apple	1 medium	3.3 g
Dried dates	5 pieces	3.3 g

If it becomes difficult to eat fruits and vegetables, you can use fiber supplements such as Metamucil®, Fibercon® or Citrucel® to prevent constipation. However, the fiber in fruits, vegetables or supplements alone will not reverse constipation caused by pain medication.

## Medications and treatments

Below is a list of medications you may use to treat constipation, as directed by your clinician.

- Docusate sodium (Colace®)
- Psyllium (Metamucil®)
- Senna
- Polyethylene glycol (MiraLAX®)
- Methylcellulose (Citrucel®)

**Warning: Do not take a laxative product if you have cramps, nausea, vomiting or abdominal pain.**

Your clinician may recommend other medications, enemas or stool-softening suppositories. Talk with your clinician before taking these.