

Constipation Management

Constipation means being unable to move your bowels, having bowel movements less often than what is normal for you, or having to push harder to move your bowels than you have in the past. Being less active, eating or drinking less, or taking certain medications can cause constipation. Keeping your bowel movements regular and easy to pass is important.

What to Expect

- Eat at regular times each day.
- Drink enough fluids if you add medication or fiber to your diet to prevent or treat constipation.
- Try to drink at least 64 ounces of liquid each day.

You can drink water, prune juice, warm juices, decaffeinated teas, and hot water with added lemon juice and honey. This also includes any food that is liquid at room temperature, such as frozen ice pops, sherbet, gelatin, or ice cream.

If you are at risk for constipation or have constipation, establish a bowel plan to be regular. Ask your physician which bowel plan is right for you.

Use laxatives only on the advice of your physician. Contact your doctor if you have not had a bowel movement for 3 days or longer.

Exercising regularly helps keep your digestive system healthy and active. The National Institutes of Health recommends exercising about 20 to 30 minutes daily to help prevent constipation.

Tips for Adding Fiber

Insoluble and soluble fibers are both helpful to stop constipation. Foods with a lot of fiber include wheat bran, whole-grain breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables (raw and cooked with skins and peels on), popcorn, and dried beans.

Caution: Make sure that a high-fiber diet is recommended. If you have no appetite or problems chewing or swallowing, get full very quickly, or have ever been told that you need a low-fiber, low-residue diet, these foods may not be recommended.

Food labels list fiber content as “dietary fiber.” The general recommendation is to eat approximately 25 grams (women) and 38 grams (men) every day; however, the right amount of fiber can be different for each person depending on need and the ability to digest fiber.

Dealing with Abdominal Gas

If you are dealing with abdominal gas, there are a number of guidelines to follow.

- Limit drinks and foods that cause gas, such as carbonated drinks, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumbers, dried beans, peas, and onions. Abdominal gas should disappear when bowel function returns to normal.
- Swallowing air can cause abdominal gas. To swallow less air, drink without a straw, avoid chewing gum, and try not to talk while eating.
- Consider taking an over-the-counter supplement, such as Beano or a similar product, or a product containing simethicone.
- Being active helps to eliminate gas.

Fiber Content in Common Foods*

Food	Serving Size	Dietary Fiber
<i>Breads and Cereals</i>		
Bran cereals	½ cup	3-13
Popcorn	2 cups	5
Brown rice	½ cup	6
Whole-wheat bread	1 slice	1-2
Wheat bran (raw)	¼ cup	6
Ground flaxseed	2 tbsp	4
<i>Legumes</i>		
Kidney beans [†]	½ cup	8
Navy beans	½ cup	9
<i>Vegetables</i>		
Broccoli [†]	½ cup	4
Brussels sprouts [†]	½ cup	3
Carrots	½ cup	2

Corn	½ cup	5
Green peas	½ cup	3
Potato with skin	1 medium	3
Fruit		
Apple with peel	1 medium	4
Banana	1 medium	4
Blueberries	½ cup	2
Pear with skin	1 medium	5
Prunes	3	3
Orange	1 medium	3
Raisins	¼ cup	3
Strawberries	1 cup	3

* The general recommendation for fiber is 25 grams for women and 38 grams for men daily. Increase fiber gradually to prevent discomfort.

† These foods can cause abdominal gas.

Source: Adapted from Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Constipation Management handout for patient education.