

# Bowel Obstruction and Ileus Prevention

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Some people have a high risk of developing a bowel obstruction (blockage) or an ileus (decrease in bowel activity or peristalsis) that will prevent food from passing through the digestive tract. Symptoms of a bowel obstruction or ileus include nausea, vomiting, intense abdominal pain, bloating, and cramping.

If you are at risk, a low-fiber diet can help because it limits the amount of food waste that needs to move through the intestine.

## **A Word of Caution**

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Bowel obstructions require immediate medical attention. If you have concerns about your bowel habits, be sure to contact your doctor. For example, call your doctor if:

- You have no bowel movement for 3 days.
- You experience nausea, vomiting, or abdominal pain.
- You have difficulty tolerating any foods other than clear liquids for more than 2 days.

Also contact your doctor before taking any over-the-counter bowel medication.

## Food Choices to Lower Your Risk of Bowel Obstruction or Ileus

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- Avoid foods with 2 or more grams of fiber per serving. Read Nutrition Facts labels on food packages to identify how much fiber is in one serving.
- Refer to the chart at the end of this handout for recommended low-fiber foods as well as foods you may want to avoid.
- Choose grain foods (such as breads, biscuits, soft buns, crackers, pasta, and cereals) made with refined white flour instead of those made with whole grains, cracked wheat, or bran.
- Avoid seeds and nuts.
- Eat fruits and vegetables that are cooked or canned, and avoid raw produce.
- Remove skins before cooking or eating fruits and vegetables.
- Drink at least 8 to 10 cups of fluids a day. Sip small amounts often and throughout the day.
- If you have bloating or cramps, avoid gas-producing foods such as broccoli, cabbage, and melons. Carbonated drinks, chewing gum, and drinking through a straw can also cause gas.
- To manage bloating, nausea, or vomiting, follow a clear liquid diet for a couple of days if it is recommended by your doctor or registered dietitian (RD). Clear liquids include juice, ice pops (Popsicles), gelatin, and broth.

## Recommended and Possibly Not Recommended Foods for a Low-Fiber Diet

<b>Food Group</b>	<b>Recommended Foods</b>	<b>Foods That May Cause Distress</b>
High-protein foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All meats, poultry, and fish</li> <li>• Well-cooked eggs</li> <li>• All soups</li> <li>• Milk, cheese, and yogurt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beans and peas</li> <li>• Peanut butter</li> <li>• Nuts and seeds</li> </ul>
Grain foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bread, bagels, English muffins, and crackers made with refined white flour</li> <li>• Refined cereals such as cream of wheat, cornflakes, and rice cereals</li> <li>• Pasta made with refined flour</li> <li>• White rice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole grain breads, pasta, crackers, and cereals</li> <li>• Brown rice</li> <li>• Popcorn</li> <li>• Any grain food made with seeds, nuts, or dried fruit</li> </ul>
Fruits and vegetables (limit to 3 servings a day)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peeled fresh fruit</li> <li>• Bananas</li> <li>• Canned fruit</li> <li>• Soft-cooked or canned vegetables without skins</li> <li>• Potatoes without skins</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apples</li> <li>• Pears</li> <li>• Prunes and other dried fruit</li> <li>• Berries</li> <li>• Asparagus</li> <li>• Sweet potatoes</li> <li>• Raw vegetables and salads</li> </ul>
Beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Juice and soft drinks</li> <li>• Coffee</li> <li>• Tea</li> <li>• Cocoa</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alcoholic beverages</li> </ul>

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## Recommended and Possibly Not Recommended Foods for a Low-Fiber Diet *(continued)*

Food Group	Recommended Foods	Foods That May Cause Distress
Desserts and other foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cakes, cookies, and pies</li> <li>• Pudding</li> <li>• Ice cream and sherbet</li> <li>• Margarine</li> <li>• Vegetable oil</li> <li>• Condiments (ketchup, yellow mustard, mayonnaise)</li> <li>• Herbs and ground spices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desserts made with nuts, seeds, or dried fruit</li> <li>• Condiments containing seeds</li> <li>• Spices that are seeds and not ground</li> </ul>