

Constipation

Constipation occurs when you cannot move your bowels, when you have bowel movements less often than normal, or when you have to push harder than usual to move your bowels. Constipation can be painful or uncomfortable. It is a common side effect of some types of cancer, cancer treatments, and changes in eating habits due to nausea.

Causes of Constipation

Causes of constipation include:

- Being less active than is normal for you
- Eating or drinking less than your usual amounts
- Chemotherapy
- Taking certain medications, such as medications for nausea or pain
- Taking calcium or iron supplements

Tips to Prevent or Manage Constipation

The following tips may help you keep your bowel movements regular and easy to pass:

- Eat at about the same times each day.
- At breakfast, drink a hot beverage or eat hot cereal to stimulate a bowel movement.

- Try to drink at least 64 fluid ounces (8 cups) of liquid each day. Getting enough fluid is especially important if you add more fiber to your diet or if you take medicines that can cause constipation. For variety, drink water, prune juice, warm fruit or vegetable juices, decaffeinated teas, or hot water with added lemon juice and honey. Fluids also include foods that are liquid at room temperature, like frozen ice pops, gelatin, or ice cream.
- Discuss with your registered dietitian (RD) whether you should increase the amount of fiber you consume each day. (See “A Word of Caution.”)
- If you plan to add fiber to your diet, do so slowly to prevent discomfort.
 - Increase the amount of fiber you eat by no more than 5 grams each day.
 - Continue adding 5 grams a day until you reach the daily goal set with your RD (usually 25 to 38 grams of fiber per day).
- To get more fiber:
 - Eat plenty of foods rich in fiber, such as wheat bran, whole grain breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables, popcorn, and dried beans. (See also the chart at the end of this handout.)
 - Read the Nutrition Facts on food labels to find out how many grams of dietary fiber are in one serving of various packaged foods. Comparing similar products can help you choose higher fiber options.
 - Sprinkle 1 teaspoon of bran on cereal.
 - Add 1 teaspoon ground flax seed to casseroles, cereals, or other foods.

A Word of Caution

Do not start a high-fiber diet without first talking to your doctor or registered dietitian (RD). Because high-fiber foods can fill you up quickly without providing lots of calories, they might not be the best choices if your appetite is poor. High-fiber foods can also be difficult for some people to chew, swallow, or digest.

- If possible, increase the amount of physical activity you do. Physical activity can help you move your bowels more regularly. Check with your doctor *before* starting any exercise.
- Ask your doctor before using bulking agents or over-the-counter stool softeners or laxatives.
- Allow yourself enough time in the bathroom to have a bowel movement. Try not to rush yourself.

Fiber Content of Common Foods

Food	Serving Size	Dietary Fiber
Grains, breads, and cereals		
Wheat bran, raw	1/4 cup	6 grams
Bran cereals	1/2 cup	3–13 grams
Ground flax seed	1 tablespoon	3 grams
Whole wheat bread	1 slice	2–3 grams
Popcorn	1 cup	1 gram
Brown rice	1/2 cup	2 grams
Dried beans		
Kidney beans*	1/2 cup	8 grams
Navy beans*	1/2 cup	6 grams

Continues

Fiber Content of Common Foods *(continued)*

Food	Serving Size	Dietary Fiber
Vegetables		
Green peas	1/2 cup	4 grams
Potato with skin	1 medium	4 grams
Cooked broccoli*	1/2 cup	3 grams
Brussels sprouts*	1/2 cup	3 grams
Carrots	1/2 cup	2 grams
Corn	1/2 cup	2 grams
Fruits		
Apple with peel	1 medium	3 grams
Pear with skin	1 medium	3 grams
Banana	1 medium	3 grams
Orange	1 medium	3 grams
Strawberries	1 cup	3 grams
Blueberries	1/2 cup	2 grams
Prunes	3	3 grams
Raisins	1/4 cup	2 grams

*These foods can cause gas.