

Constipation

Medical Management

Constipation is difficulty passing stools or a decrease in the normal frequency of your bowel movements. It can be a side effect of some chemotherapy, anti-nausea and pain medications, lack of physical activity, reduced fluid intake, and/or poor nutrition. Constipation may require medication, but check with your doctor or nurse before you self-treat with over-the-counter medication. This includes stool softeners, laxatives, and enemas. Please talk to your doctor or nurse for additional information about medical management of constipation if you have questions about this issue.

Using Nutrition to Help Yourself

If you are struggling with constipation, you can manage this symptom by choosing the right food, avoiding things that may worsen constipation, and carefully planning your eating schedule.

Nutrition Tips for Constipation

- Whenever possible, work with your doctor, nurse, or dietitian to prevent constipation before it occurs. If medication is prescribed, follow the instructions exactly.
- Have meals and snacks at the same time each day. Keep a regular schedule of eating.
- Drink plenty of water and other liquids. Aim for 8 to 10 cups of caffeine-free fluid every day. Dehydration will worsen constipation.
- Eat a good breakfast at the same time every day and include warm food and drinks, such as oatmeal and tea.

What to Eat and Drink

- When possible, include warm food items such as soup with your meals.
- Include food that contains liquid, such as watermelon and grapes.
- Add dried fruit, such as apricots, raisins, dried plums (prunes), and dates to your diet.
- Eat more food that is high in insoluble fiber, including fruit with the skin or peel; raw vegetables; beans and peas; dried fruit; nuts and seeds; and whole grains. Slowly add in this high-fiber food and drink plenty of fluid to aid digestion.
- Try wheat bran and high-fiber whole wheat products.
- Add 1 to 2 tablespoons of ground flaxseed to your cereal, oatmeal, or low-fat yogurt.
- See our chart below for more high-fiber food ideas.

What to Avoid

- Chocolate.
- Food that is high in sugar and low in fiber.
- Eggs and high-fat dairy, such as milk, ice cream, and cheese, if these seem to worsen your constipation.
- Chewing gum.
- Sugar substitutes, such as Nutrasweet, Splenda, mannitol, and sorbitol.
- It is important to eat plenty of fiber; however, if gas is a problem you may need to avoid certain gas-producing food, such as beans, cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and cauliflower; onions, corn, peas, cucumbers, and peppers; and some fruit, such as cantaloupe and other types of melon, and apricots, prunes, and raw apples.



A Few High Fiber Food Choices

<i>Food</i>	<i>Serving Size</i>	<i>Fiber Content (Grams)</i>
Breads/Cereals		
Bran cereal	1/2 cup	6-12
Wheat bran	1/4 cup	6
Popcorn (air popped)	2 cups	5
Oatmeal (cooked)	1/2 cup	4
Nuts/Seeds*		
Almonds or sunflower seeds	1 ounce	4
Peanuts	1 ounce	3
Legumes (beans)		
Navy beans	1/2 cup	9
Kidney beans or lentils	1/2 cup	8
Chickpeas (garbanzo beans)	1/2 cup	7
Fruit		
Pear (with skin)	1 medium	5
Apple (with peel)	1 medium	4
Blackberries or raspberries	1/2 cup	4
Vegetables		
Corn on the cob	1 ear	6
Broccoli or corn	1/2 cup	4
Greens (kale, chard, mustard)	1/2 cup	3