

Reducing Constipation

The way to reduce constipation is to eat regular meals that include high-fibre foods, drink lots of water and exercise. Start to slowly make these changes so that you will feel well and not get cramps or gas. It will take a while for your body to get used to the extra fibre and extra water. Over time, your bowel muscles will get stronger and work for you again.

Fibre

Start eating more high-fibre foods as shown on the next pages. Have high-fibre foods at every meal.

Read labels

- If a serving gives you 2-4 grams of fibre it is a good source of fibre. More than 4 grams of fibre, is even better.

Grain products

- Whole grain (brown) breads such as rye, 100% whole wheat, multigrain and pumpernickel. Choose bagels and buns that are made with whole grains.
- Muffins made with whole wheat or bran, oatmeal cookies, Graham wafers, whole wheat crackers and whole wheat waffles.



- Brown and wild rice, and whole wheat spaghetti and pasta.
- High-fibre cold cereals such as All Bran, Bran Flakes, Bran Buds, Grape Nuts, Shredded Wheat, Wheatabix, Corn Bran, Shreddies, Muslix and granola.
- High-fibre hot cereals such as Red River or Sunny Boy cereal, oatmeal, oat bran cereal, corn meal cereal or cooked bulgar cereal.

Vegetables and fruits

- Eat plenty of vegetables, including the skin. Some high-fibre vegetables are beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots (and V-8 juice), cauliflower, corn, green or yellow beans, onions, parsnips, peas, potatoes, radishes and other salad items, spinach, squash, tomatoes, turnips and yams.
- Eat three or more fruits each day. Have fresh fruit if you can. Some high-fibre fruit are apricots, apples (or applesauce), berries, cherries, kiwi fruit, nectarines, oranges, plums and pears.
- Eat dried fruits such as prunes, figs, raisins and dates.
- Prune juice and rhubarb are natural laxatives.
- Whole fruits with the skin have the most fibre, but if these are hard for you to eat try apple sauce, or canned pears or canned pineapple.

Dried beans and peas, nuts and seeds

- Nuts such as peanuts and peanut butter, walnuts and almonds.
- Seeds such as sunflower seeds, sesame seeds or pumpkin seeds (with the shell left on).
- Dried beans, peas and lentils can be used in soups, salads and casseroles. You can soak dried beans and peas or buy them ready-to-eat from a can. Have beans in tomato sauce, kidney beans, black beans, split pea soup or chick peas. Try hummus (chick pea spread) on crackers.

Other foods

- High fibre snack foods such as popcorn, tortilla chips, whole wheat pretzels, trail mix or banana chips.

Ideas to increase fibre in your meals

- Sprinkle a tablespoon or two of cooking bran on hot cereal, casseroles, desserts or salads.
- Add a couple of teaspoons of whole flax seed to cereal or other foods.
- When baking muffins, cookies or pancakes add bran, flax seeds or wheat germ. Replace half of the white flour with whole wheat flour.

See Handout —
Drinking Fluids.

Fluid

Drink plenty of water. Water is needed to make the fibre do its work in your body. Without water, fibre can actually make you more constipated. Try to drink 6-8 cups of fluid (not including regular coffee or tea) each day. It is best if at least half of this fluid is water. A glass of warm or hot water first thing in the morning often helps.

Note: Having a drink of alcohol (such as a glass of wine) or a cup of coffee with a meal may help stimulate your bowels. Talk to your doctor before drinking alcohol.

See Handout —
Helpful Hints
for Active
Living.

Exercise

Be as active as you can. Walking around the house or even doing exercises when lying down can help reduce constipation.

Regular habits

Try to go to the bathroom at a regular time. Right after breakfast may be a good time. You don't need to have a bowel movement every day, but the movement should be soft and easy to pass.

A footstool and padded toilet seat may help you be more comfortable as you sit. If you need equipment like a toilet chair or handrails, or you need extra help in toileting, talk to your Home Care worker.

Relaxing

Stress can make all your muscles tighten and can cause constipation. Try to relax. A hot bath helps some people.

Medications

Laxatives

- Once you are having more fibre and fluid and doing more exercise, you should be able to reduce or stop your use of laxatives. This will be a good change because using laxatives makes your bowel muscles lazy. Laxatives can also draw out of your body important nutrients and fluids.

Other medications

- Many medications (such as codeine) can cause constipation. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist. Maybe there is a different kind of pill for you that would not make you constipated.

Other Approaches

If you cannot follow the above suggestions, or if you have been constipated for a long time, talk to your Home Care nurse or doctor about using a stool softener, or possibly laxatives or enemas.

High Fibre Meal Plan

On Rising

- large glass of warm water

Breakfast

- orange or a half grapefruit
- hot cereal topped with 2 teaspoons of flax or 1 tablespoon of bran, or a bowl of All Bran cereal
- milk
- slice of whole wheat toast with crunchy peanut butter
- cup of tea or coffee

Mid-morning snack

- dish of stewed prunes
- glass of water

Lunch

- glass of water
- sandwich made with: whole wheat or rye bread with margarine, cheese or meat, and lettuce
- tomato slices or radishes
- milk
- oatmeal cookie

Mid-afternoon snack

- 2 glasses of water during the afternoon
- 1 bran muffin

Dinner

- glass of water
- meat, chicken or fish
- baked potato with skin or mashed potato with 1 teaspoon of bran
- two cooked vegetables: kernel corn and broccoli
- salad and salad dressing
- rice pudding made with brown rice and raisins
- cup of herbal tea

Evening Snack

- glass of V-8 juice
- whole wheat soda crackers and cheese