
Patient Information

Nutrition Management of

Constipation

**Comments,
Feedback?**

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Reviewed by the LRCP Patient Education Committee
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Patient Information

Constipation

What is Constipation?

Constipation is an incomplete bowel movement. It is also having less than three bowel movements per week. Constipation happens when the large bowel absorbs too much water from the stool, making it difficult to pass.

If you think you have constipation, talk to your health care team. They can provide you with information on preventing, managing and relieving constipation.

You may have constipation when:

- The bowel movement is hard, dry, and “pellet-like”
- Your bowel movement feels incomplete
- It is difficult or painful to empty your bowels
- You feel bloated and full

Why do I get constipated?

There are many reasons why you may become constipated.

- A cancerous tumour can sometimes block the intestine. Some chemotherapy treatments cause constipation.
- Medication for controlling pain, nausea, swelling, and high blood pressure
- Vitamins or supplements that contain calcium or iron
- Dehydration, or not drinking enough fluids
- Lack of fibre in your diet
- Decrease in physical activity, or being bedridden
- Putting off having a bowel movement
- Overuse of laxatives

Recipe

Fibre Smoothie

Ingredients:

- ½ cup (125 mL) of juice
- ½ cup (125 mL) of frozen mixed field berries
- ½ cup (125 mL) of plain yogurt or silken tofu
- 1 rounded tsp. (5 mL) of Benefibre™ or Metamucil®

Directions:

- Pour juice, berries and yogurt (or silken tofu) into the blender.
- Mix on high speed until smooth.
- Add Benefibre™ or Metamucil® and blend.
- Pour into a large glass and enjoy.

Serving size: 1 cup (250 mL)



Calories: 245

Fat: 2 g

Protein: 8 g

Fibre: 6-7 g

*Benefibre™ and Metamucil® can be found in drug stores or the pharmacy section of your grocery store.

How can I help my health care team diagnose constipation?

Your health care team needs to know detailed information when treating any cancer related symptoms. You can help them by keeping a record of your bowel habits. This important information provides clues and allows them to quickly treat constipation. If you think you are having problems with constipation, write down the following information:

- Date of your last bowel movement;
- Indicate size, colour, and firmness;
- Make a list of the fluids and food you are eating;
- Write the names and amount of medicines you are taking for your bowels;
- Identify any new medications or treatments you have had since your last visit;
- Identify any changes to your health.

When do I need to call for help?

During regular business hours (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), call the telephone triage nurse at the London Regional Cancer Program at 519-685-8600 and press option 3 if you have:

- No bowel movements for three days;
- Not passing gas;
- Bloating or pain in your abdomen;
- Nausea and vomiting;
- Blood in your stool.

If calling **after hours** or on weekends, call 519-685-8600 and press option 2 to reach the on-call oncologist. You may also see your family doctor. If you live outside of London, go to your local emergency department.

Contact an LRCP Registered Dietitian or a member of your health care team when you notice a change in your bowel movement habits.

COLOSTOMY

If you have a **colostomy**, you may be constipated if you do not have a bowel movement for three days.

ILEOSTOMY

If you have an **ileostomy** you will **never** become constipated. However, if the stool in your ostomy pouch does become very firm or it is difficult to pass into the pouch, you need to call your physician.

How can I manage constipation?

If you are not already using laxatives or stool softeners, talk to your oncologist. Besides medications, the most effective way to manage constipation is to increase your fibre intake and drink plenty of liquids during the day. It is important to include some fibre with every meal and snack. Depending on your age and gender, you may need between 21 g and 38 g of fibre each day (see the chart below).

Age ⇨	19 – 30	31 - 50	51 - 70	70 +
Male	38	38	30	30
Female	25	25	21	21

Health Canada Fibre Recommendations (grams/day)

Helpful Hints

Make sure you increase your fibre intake gradually to reduce bloating and gas. You will also need to drink more fluids:





- Sprinkle Fibre 1® or All Bran Buds® (1-2 tablespoons), wheat bran or psyllium husk (1-2 teaspoons) into pudding, yogurt, oatmeal, applesauce, or on top of your favourite cold cereal. Add to casseroles, soups, meatloaf, mashed potatoes, baked goods, etc.
- Add 1 rounded teaspoon of Metamucil® or Benefibre™ to beverages.
- Cut up some fresh fruit to put on your breakfast cereal, or have it for a snack.
- Include a vegetable with meals and snacks.
- Avoid skipping meals. Eat meals and snacks at regular times each day.
- Try 20 minutes of moderate activity after eating a meal.
- Include foods that are natural laxatives like prunes, prune juice, rhubarb and papaya.
- Limit fast food, processed foods, high fat foods, and large servings of meat or cheese.

Fluids to Choose

Plenty of water, prune juice, fruit juices with pulp, hot beverages (decaf coffee, herbal tea, broth, soup).

Caffeinated products may help move the bowels but can also lead to dehydration. Water is always a better choice!

Managing Your Constipation

	Foods to <u>Choose</u>	Foods to <u>Limit</u>
BREADS and CEREALS	Whole grain/multigrain breads, rye, pumpernickel.	White bread, pastries, cakes, doughnuts. 
	High fibre cereals (e.g., All Bran®, Grape Nuts®, Shredded Wheat®, Red River®). Whole grain (WG) crackers, WG pasta, WG pancakes, WG waffles and WG bagels. Brown rice, wild rice, corn meal, barley.	Low fibre cereals (e.g., Rice Krispies, Special K®, Corn Flakes, Alpha-Bits®). Crackers, pasta, pancakes and waffles made with white flour, white bagels and white rice.
FRUITS	Berries, pears, plums, apricots, apples with the skin, prunes, figs, raisins, dates, rhubarb.	Do not limit.
VEGGIES	Broccoli, brussels sprouts, asparagus, cabbage, corn, peas, spinach, tomatoes, potato (with skin). 	Do not limit.
PROTEIN	Any legumes like kidney beans, navy beans, chickpeas, lentils, etc., peanuts with the skin, walnuts, almonds 	Do not limit.
MEATS	Fish fillets, skinless chicken or turkey, lean pork, lean beef. 	Bacon, sausage, fast food burgers (including beef, chicken and fish), chicken fingers, chicken wings, fish sticks, fatty cuts of beef, pork
SNACKS	Popcorn, trail mix (with dried fruit), tortilla chips, banana chips, Fig Newtons®, oatmeal raisin cookies, date squares.	High fat/low fibre foods (e.g., potato chips, cookies, doughnuts, pastries, etc.).