

Patient Information

CONSTIPATION

Constipation is defined as having fewer bowel movements (BM's) than normal, or hard stools that require straining to pass.

Why do I get constipated?

There are many reasons why you get constipated. Some of them are specific to your recent surgical experience:

- ✓ Medication for pain or nausea (ex. narcotics)
- ✓ Dehydration
- ✓ Not enough fibre in your diet
- ✓ Lack of physical activity
- ✓ Being bed-ridden or chair bound

Your body needs three things for your bowels to work properly:

- ✓ Fibre
- ✓ Fluids
- ✓ Peristalsis (muscle contractions in the bowel)

How can I prevent constipation?

Here are some helpful hints to help relieve or prevent constipation:

- ✓ Know your normal bowel movement habits. Remember that normal bowel habits vary
- ✓ Eat a well-balanced diet that is high in fibre
- ✓ Drink plenty of liquids during the day
- ✓ Exercise regularly and go for walks
- ✓ Do not avoid the urge to have a bowel movement
- ✓ Set aside time after breakfast or dinner for undisturbed visits to the toilet

How can I manage constipation?

The most effective way to manage constipation is to increase your fibre intake. It is important to include some fibre with every meal and snack. Make sure you increase your fibre intake gradually to reduce bloating and gas. You will also need to drink more fluids:

- ✓ Sprinkle All Bran® or All Bran Buds® (1-2 tablespoons), wheat bran (1-2 teaspoons) 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 1-2 vegetables with meals and snacks
- ✓ Eat small frequent 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 (1-1/2 litres per day), prune juice, fruit juices with pulp, hot beverages (decaf tea, herbal tea, broth and soup). Caffeine products help move the bowels but can also lead to dehydration. Water is a better choice.

Recipes:

Fibre Smoothie

½ cup (125 ml.) of juice, ½ cup (125 ml.) of plain yogurt or silken tofu 1 rounded tsp. (5 ml.) of Benefibre™ or Metamucil®

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

Fruit Lax-Natural

Mix equal amounts of apple sauce, prune juice and All Bran or Raisin Bran. Refrigerate and take 1 teaspoon (5 ml.) at a time twice daily.

NOTE: if the mixture becomes dry, add more apple sauce or prune juice.

If you continue to have difficulties with constipation, please consult your family physician or pharmacist for advice.

References: Nutrition Management of Constipation, London RCP, RNAO BPG on Constipation