
Constipated?

How to Prevent and Manage your Symptoms

What is constipation?

If your bowel movements or stools are hard and difficult to pass you may be constipated. Constipation can cause stomach pain, bloating and/or a feeling that your bowels have not completely emptied after a movement. How often you have a bowel movement usually does not matter. Fewer bowel movements does not mean you are constipated as long as they are soft, pain-free and follow your usual pattern. The key is to watch whether there is a change in your bowel habits. Everyone is different but if you are having fewer than usual, you may be constipated.

What are common causes of constipation?

- A diet that is low in fibre-rich foods
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Limited daily physical activity
- Not going to the washroom when you feel the urge
- Change in your daily routine such as travelling
- Side effects from iron or calcium supplements and some medications
- Diseases and health conditions such as:
 - underactive thyroid
 - diabetes
 - celiac disease
 - irritable bowel syndrome
 - hemorrhoids



Steps you can take

1. Increase your intake of high fibre foods

Daily Fibre Needs for Adults:

<i>Age in Years</i>	<i>Daily Fibre Needs grams (g)/day</i>
Men 19 to 50	38
Men 51 and older	30
Women 19 to 50	25
Women 51 and older	21
Pregnant Women 19 and older	28
Breastfeeding Women 19 and older	29

- Fibre-rich foods help improve constipation by holding liquid in the stools and keeping them soft. Examples of high fibre foods include:
 - wheat bran
 - ground and whole flax seed
 - bran cereals
 - whole grain and whole wheat products such as breads, cereals, pasta, brown rice, oats, barley and quinoa
 - legumes such as beans, peas and lentils
 - vegetables and fruit with the skin left on.
- Add high fibre foods slowly to your diet to avoid gas, bloating, cramps and diarrhea.
- Read nutrition labels to find out the amount of fibre in the foods you eat. Choose foods which are higher in fibre. For more information about label reading and practical tips on getting more fibre in your diet, see the additional resources section below.

- Make sure you drink enough fluid to help make the fibre work. For practical tips on getting more fibre in your diet, see the additional resources section below.

2. Increase your fluid intake

- It is important to stay hydrated. Fluids help with digestion, getting rid of waste and keeping your bowels regular. Fluids help to make the fibre work better. Aim for these amounts of fluids from beverages daily:

<i>Age in Years</i>	<i>Daily Fluid Needs from Beverages</i>
Men 19 and older	3 litres (12 cups)
Women 19 and older	2.2 litres (9 cups)
Breastfeeding Women 19 and older	3.1 litres (12 ½ cups)

- Fluid includes water along with other beverages and liquids such as milk, juice, coffee, tea, broth and soup. For practical tips on getting more fluid in your diet, see the additional resource section below.

3. Include your physical activity

- Physical activity is not only part of your overall health but it helps keep your bowels regular. Health Canada recommends at least 150 minutes (2 ½ hours) of moderate to vigorous activity per week for adults. Examples of moderate physical activity include:
 - brisk walking
 - biking
 - raking leaves
 - swimming
 - dancing
 - water aerobics
- See the additional resources section for more information on physical activity.

Special Considerations

- No specific foods cause constipation. Cheese, milk or other dairy products do not cause constipation.
- Prunes are commonly given to help with constipation. Prunes, pears and apples, contain natural ingredients that have a laxative effect and may help to make the stool softer and easier to pass.

Fruit and Fibre Mix is a prune-containing fruit spread that is high in fibre and can be prepared at home. It is used to help constipation.

Fruit and Fibre Mix

Prunes	250 mL (1 cup)
Raisins	375 mL (1 ½ cups)
Dates	250 mL (1 cup)
Figs	125 mL (½ cup)
Orange Juice	250 mL (1 cup)
Prune Juice	175 mL (2/3 cup)
Wheat bran (optional)	250 mL (1 cup)
Combine prunes, raisins, dates and figs. Add orange juice and prune juice and let mixture soak overnight. Blend in a blender. You may need to blend ¼ to ½ of the mixture at a time depending on your blender. Add wheat bran if desired.	
Start by including 15 mL (1 Tbsp) each day and increase as desired. Fruit and Fibre Mix can be kept up to two weeks in the refrigerator or it can be frozen. Spread it on toast or add it to hot cereal or plain yogurt.	

- Schedule regular times during the day for a bowel movement. This will help get your body into a routine. Make sure to choose a time when you do not have to rush.

- See your doctor if:
 - you are on medications that may cause constipation
 - dietary changes do not help
 - you experience a sudden change in bowel habits
 - if you are planning to take laxatives



Additional Resources

- Healthy Eating Guidelines for Increasing Your Fibre Intake www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=JMfsUQI=&PreviewHandout=bA==
- Food Sources of Fibre www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=JMzuXgE=&PreviewHandout=bA==
- Guidelines for Drinking Fluid for Staying Hydrated www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=JMfsXwc=&PreviewHandout=bA==

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Notes

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