

What About Laxatives ?

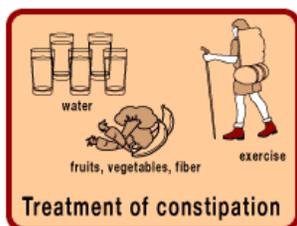
Laxatives are medications which can be used to manage constipation. Try making diet changes first. If your constipation does not improve, talk to your doctor about using laxatives.

Some laxatives used are:

- Bowel muscle stimulant laxatives such as senna or sennosides.
- Lactulose that helps by pulling water into your bowels to soften and move the stool.
- Stool softeners help your stool hold water and become soft.
- Glycerin suppositories stimulate your bowel muscles to push the stool out.

Remember . . .

If you are taking medication for constipation, you should still exercise and drink fluids.



Helpful Hints for Having a Bowel Movement

Diet, exercise and stress all effect how well your bowels move. You need to pay attention to your body's signs telling you it is time to go to the bathroom. It may take weeks to get into a normal bowel routine.

- Don't ignore the urge to have a bowel movement. The best time is 15–40 minutes after a meal for example, breakfast.
- Do not hold your stool and make the feeling pass.
- Relax in a quiet spot. Read a book or magazine.
- Drink a glass of water or other liquid.
- Go to the toilet after each meal to get into a pattern.
- Go to the bathroom at the same time each day.
- Have your feet flat on the floor or on a stool when you sit on the toilet.
- Do not push or strain to have a bowel movement.



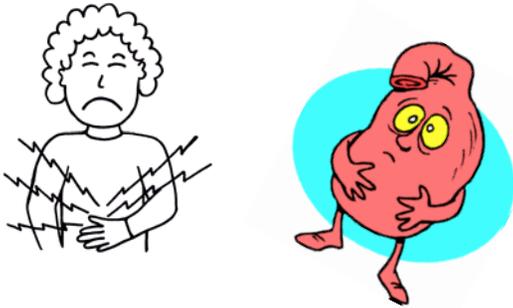
Surrey Memorial Hospital

Acute Care: Managing Constipation in Adults



What is Constipation ?

There are many definitions of constipation. However, if you have small, hard stools (bowel movements) that are difficult to pass, you may be constipated. You may also have a feeling of not being able to fully empty your bowel. Constipation may cause abdominal pain and bloating in some people. Everyone has their own individual bowel pattern. You may have a bowel movement every day or up to every 3 days.



What Causes Constipation?

There are different causes of constipation. When you are in the hospital, constipation is more likely to happen for the following reasons:

- Staying in bed and not moving around or not being able to do your normal routine.
- Some medications, such as pain medications, water pills, and sleeping medications.
- A change in food, fluid and your normal diet due to surgery or illness.
- The hospital being a strange place, often with no privacy.

How Do I Prevent or Treat Constipation While in Hospital?

There are 3 things that you can do to prevent constipation:

1. Drink Fluids

It is recommended to drink all the fluids you are provided on your meal trays and continue to drink fluid like water and juices throughout the day. Drinking plenty of fluids is important to help you have a soft bowel movement.



- Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water a day.
- Avoid drinks that contain caffeine such as coffee, tea, colas.

Caffeine can remove water from your body and can make your stool hard.

If you have a medical condition and you are **NOT** allowed to drink a lot of fluids, talk to your doctor, nurse or ask to see a Dietitian. They can help you find a way to prevent constipation that is safe for you.

2. Exercise

Exercise and activity help your bowels to keep moving.

- You may be asked to walk for 15-20 minutes once or twice a day.
- If you have difficulty walking or moving, we will help you to walk and help you to sit up.



3. Eat Fibre

Dietary fibre and fluids are needed to keep the stools soft, bulky and easily passed. High fibre foods help to hold the water in the stools. When you eat more high fibre foods, remember to also drink more fluids (at least 6 to 8 cups per day).

A high fibre diet and fluid together may help prevent constipation.



Good high fibre food choices are:

- Bran cereal or muffins
- Whole wheat and whole grain products (breads, crackers, pasta, brown rice)
- Fruits and vegetables (including dried fruits)

Increase fibre in your diet slowly and over time, because an increase in fibre too soon may cause cramping and/or gas.

A simple way to add more fibre in your diet is:

- Sprinkle 1 tablespoon of natural bran on top of your cereal or eat bran cereal at breakfast or as a snack.
- Another natural laxative is fruit puree, which is a combination of dried fruits.