

Constipation

Constipation is when your bowels move less often and your stools (poops) become hard and dry. You might strain or push hard to have a bowel movement. You might feel bloated or have cramps.

A person can become constipated for a number of reasons such as:

- drinking less liquids
- changes in diet
- staying in bed or being less active
- after surgery or during an illness
- taking certain pain medicines such as opioids

If constipation is usually a problem for you, talk to your family practitioner or surgeon.

Ways to prevent and manage constipation

- Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses (1½ to 2 litres) of liquid every day, unless a doctor, dietitian, or other healthcare provider has told you something different.
 - All liquids count including water, milk, soup, broth, juice, coffee, and tea.
 - Hot drinks might help get your bowels moving.
- Add high fibre foods to your diet, such as fruits, vegetables, lentils, whole grains, high fibre cereals, nuts, chia seeds, and ground flax.
 - Include a natural laxative in your daily diet such as prunes, prune juice, or kiwis.
 - Consider consulting a dietitian.
- Increase your activity level each day, as you are able. The more active you are, the more you help your bowels to move.
- Create a routine for your gut.
 - Eat at regular times each day.
 - Set aside enough time to go to the toilet.
 - Don't ignore the urge to go!

If you are still constipated

Remember - not everyone has a bowel movement every day. Everyone has their own pattern. Bowel movements should be soft and easy to pass.

Sometimes liquids, fibre, and activity are not enough to get your bowels moving.

If you do not have a bowel movement for 3 to 4 days, a fibre supplement or laxative could help. Before taking either of these, check with your family practitioner, surgeon, or pharmacist about which is best for you.

Caution

Fibre supplements made from psyllium (such as Metamucil) or from inulin (such as Benefibre) are helpful for some people, and not for others. For example, fibre supplements can make the constipation worse when taking opioids.

Common laxatives include sennosides (Senokot®), PEG or polyethylene glycol (Restoralax®, Lax-A-Day®) lactulose, and medicines with magnesium (Milk of Magnesia).

When starting a laxative or fibre supplement, start with a low dose and slowly increase until you find the right dose for you. Follow the instructions either from your family practitioner or on the package.

When to get medical help

Call your family practitioner or surgeon in any of these situations:

- You have bad stomach pains, you are throwing up, and you feel bloated.
- You see blood in your stool.
- You have increased your liquids, fibre, and activity but you are still constipated.
- You have been taking a laxative for 3 weeks and you are still constipated.

Family practitioner refers to a family doctor or nurse practitioner.