

## Constipation

### *Causes and tips*

#### Causes of Constipation

- A change in the foods you eat or changes in when you eat
- Some prescription pain medicines such as opioids
- Not being as physically active as usual
- Cesarean birth and other types of surgery

#### Tips to Ease Constipation

- **Increase the amount of fluid** you drink. Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day, plus the liquids you drink with your meals.

Signs that you are not drinking enough are:

- You are urinating less than normal.
- Your urine is dark-colored.
- You feel dizzy when you stand up.

- **Eat high-fiber foods.** One of the best sources of fiber is breakfast cereal with 5 or more grams of fiber per serving. Read the Nutrition Facts label on the box to find the fiber content.

Other high-fiber foods are dry and unsalted peanuts, whole wheat bread, parsnips, white or red grapefruit, cantaloupe, cooked carrots, prunes, green peas, baked beans, kidney beans, and split peas.



*Eat high-fiber foods to help ease constipation.*

- **Try to have meals at the same time each day.** It helps to eat breakfast at the same time every day. This helps get your bowels on a regular schedule.



To help lessen constipation, try to eat breakfast at the same time every day.

- **If you are allowed to drink coffee, have some with your breakfast.** Coffee helps your bowels move. Decaf works, too.
- **Drink cold or warm prune juice** with breakfast.
- **Walk or do other light exercise after breakfast** to increase the movement of food through your body.
- **Most people feel the urge to have a bowel movement about 20 minutes after a meal.** If you feel the urge, try to go right away instead of waiting. The body absorbs fluid from the bowel. This means constipation may be worse if you wait.
- **Do not just sit on the toilet and read a book.** Sitting on the toilet for a long time can cause painful swelling or hemorrhoids. Wait until you feel the urge to have a bowel movement, and then go and sit on the toilet.

## Laxatives

After an operation, a laxative is sometimes needed to help get bowels moving. Your doctor may suggest a laxative or you can buy one over the counter (without a prescription) at any drugstore.

- **Senna tablets:** Usually work overnight.
- **Milk of Magnesia liquid** (*magnesium hydroxide*): Works overnight.
- **Miralax or GaviLax** (*polyethylene glycol*): Works in 1 to 3 days.
- **Bisacodyl rectal suppositories:** Work in about 20 minutes.
- **Fleets enema:** Works in about 15 minutes.

## Call Your Healthcare Provider If You:

- Had a Cesarean birth and trying these tips for 3 days has not helped you have a bowel movement.
- Are sick to your stomach and throwing up.

### Questions?

Your questions are important. If you have questions about constipation, call your healthcare provider during office hours.

**Now, please go back to the Table of Contents of this workbook and check the box so your nurses will know you have read this chapter.**