

# Constipation After Surgery

## *Causes and prevention*

*This handout explains why patients often become constipated after surgery. It includes tips to help avoid or lessen the problem.*

### What causes constipation after surgery?

These things can lead to constipation after surgery:

- A change in your eating habits
- Lower fluid intake
- Taking opioid pain medicine
- Less activity

### Tips to Lessen Constipation

- **Take the stool softener** that your doctor prescribed, as directed (Miralax, Colace, or Docusate).
- **Eat a diet high in fiber.** Some high-fiber foods are breakfast cereal with 5 grams or more per serving (Shredded Wheat, All-Bran, Fiber One), peanuts, whole wheat bread, parsnips, grapefruit, cantaloupe, carrots, prunes, peas, beans, split peas, pears, and mangos.
- **Increase the amount of fluids you drink.** This will keep your stool soft. Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day. Signs that you are not drinking enough are:
  - You are urinating less than normal.
  - Your urine is dark in color.
  - You get dizzy or lightheaded when you stand up.



*Eating high-fiber foods can help prevent constipation.*

- **Try to eat at the same time each day.** Eating breakfast at the same time every day can help your bowels get back on schedule.
- **Drink coffee or prune juice with breakfast.** Decaf coffee works as well as caffeinated.
- **Exercise or walk** to stimulate your bowels.
- **Do not delay getting to the bathroom.** If you feel the urge to have a bowel movement, head to the bathroom.
- **Laxatives** can be useful to get things started. Milk of magnesia works overnight. You can buy this at a drugstore without a prescription.

## When to Call Your Doctor

To prevent problems with your healing process after surgery, call your doctor if:

- You have to strain hard to have a bowel movement.
- It has been 3 days since your surgery, you have tried the “Tips to Lessen Constipation” in this handout, and you still have not had a bowel movement.
- You are nauseated and throwing up.
- You feel dizzy or lightheaded when you stand up.

Please call the Urology and Urogynecology Clinic at 206.598.5960 if you have any questions or concerns.

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call the Urology and Urogynecology Clinic at 206.598.5960.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.6190 and ask to page the Gynecology or Urology resident on call.