



Managing Constipation

Changing your diet to regulate your bowels

Constipation is a condition where bowel movements are difficult and infrequent.

Constipation can lead to problems with **hemorrhoids** (painful, swollen veins in the anus) or **anal fissures** (tears in the lining of the anus).

The first steps in preventing or recovering from these problems are to soften your stools and have more regular bowel movements.

You can do several things to bring about these changes in your bowel habits.

This handout lists things you can start doing today, before your visit with a gastrointestinal doctor.

Tips to Prevent Constipation

Fluids

Drink at least 8 glasses of liquids daily. Drink a hot liquid like coffee or tea to stimulate your bowels when you wake up in the morning. Limit the amount of coffee, tea, or other drinks with caffeine for the rest of the day.

Physical Activity

Being physically active will stimulate your bowels and improve regularity.

Fiber

The daily recommendation for dietary fiber is 20 to 30 grams a day. It can include both soluble and insoluble fiber.

- *Soluble fiber* dissolves in water. It is found in citrus fruits, oats, peas, and beans.
- *Insoluble fiber* does not dissolve in water and is found in wheat bran and some vegetables.

Therapeutic Fiber

This is an over-the-counter product that you can buy at your pharmacy. Two brands are Citrucel, which contains *methylcellulose*, or Metamucil, which contains *psyllium*.

All fiber is good for you, whether it comes from food or in pill, wafer, or powder form.

Fluid intake is important to prevent and to treat constipation.

Fiber regulates your bowels by holding water in your stool and adding bulk. This will either speed things up or slow them down.

Stool Softeners

These over-the-counter products, such as docusate or colace, soften your bowels. They can be used every day.

Laxatives

Milk of magnesia and senna are two laxatives that help ease constipation by stimulating your bowels. They are not good long-term solutions and should not be used often.

Why Take More Fiber

Fiber adds bulk to your stool and absorbs the water you drink as it passes through your intestines. By drawing in water, it keeps your stools from becoming too hard.

If your stools are too loose, fiber will add bulk and help make them more firm.

How to Add More Fiber to Your Diet

Include more high-fiber foods in your diet. Start reading labels of the foods that you eat. Dietary fiber content is listed in the nutrition facts on the packaging of all foods. See the example of the cereal box label on page 6. Also see the chart on pages 3 and 4, which lists common foods and their fiber content.

When you start adding more fiber to your diet, you may have more gas and some cramping. To avoid this, add your fiber gradually so your body can adjust to the increase. **You also need to drink more liquids**, or the added fiber can actually make you constipated. Fiber can absorb more than its own weight in water.

Tips to Manage Constipation

What you eat and when you eat will affect your bowel movements.

- **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.
- **Do not skip meals.** Eating stimulates the bowels. Breakfast is especially important because it is the first meal of the day. If you are not a breakfast eater, then take an over-the-counter fiber remedy instead.
- **Drink something warm with breakfast.** If you are allowed to drink coffee, have some with breakfast. If you are not a coffee drinker, then have a different warm drink with breakfast.
- **Exercise each day.** Walking and other forms of exercise help food move through your bowels.

Dietary Fiber in Foods	Amount	Weight (grams)	Fiber (grams)
Bread and Crackers			
Graham crackers	2 squares	14.2	1.4
Pumpernickel bread	$\frac{3}{4}$ slice	24	1.4
Rye bread	1 slice	25	0.8
Whole wheat bread	1 slice	25	1-3
Whole wheat cracker	6 crackers	19.8	2.2
Whole wheat roll	$\frac{3}{4}$ roll	21	1.2
Cereals			
All Bran 100%	$\frac{1}{3}$ cup	28	8.4
Bran Chex	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	21	4.1
Corn Bran	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	21	4.4
Corn Flakes	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup	21	2.6
Fiber One, Original	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	30	14.0
Grapenuts Flakes	$\frac{2}{3}$ cup	21	2.5
Grapenuts	3 Tbsp.	21	2.7
Kashi Good Friends	$\frac{2}{3}$ cup	35	12.0
Oatmeal	$\frac{3}{4}$ pkg.	21	2.5
Shredded Wheat	1 biscuit	21	2.8
Wheaties	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup	21	2.6
Fruit			
Apple	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	83	2.0
Apricot	2	72	1.4
Banana	$\frac{1}{2}$ medium	54	1.5
Blackberries	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup	108	6.7
Cantaloupe	1 cup	160	1.6
Cherries	10 large	68	1.1
Dates, dried	2	18	1.6
Figs, dried	1 medium	20	3.7
Grapes, white	10	50	0.5
Grapefruit	$\frac{1}{3}$	87	0.8
Honeydew melon	1 cup	170	1.5
Orange	1 small	78	1.6
Peach	1 medium	100	2.3
Pear	$\frac{1}{2}$ medium	82	2.0
Pineapple	$\frac{1}{2}$	78	0.8
Plums	3 small	85	1.8
Prunes, dried	2	15	2.4
Raisins	$1\frac{1}{2}$ Tbsp.	14	1.0
Strawberries	1 cup	143	3.1
Tangerine	1 large	101	2.0
Watermelon	1 cup	160	1.4

	Amount	Weight (grams)	Fiber (grams)
High-Fiber Supplement			
Fibermed	2	35.4	10.0
Meat, Milk, Eggs			
Beef, chicken, pork, turkey	1 oz.	28	0
Cheese	$\frac{3}{4}$ oz.	21	0
Eggs	3 large	99	0
Fish	2 oz.	56	0
Milk	1 cup	240	0
Rice			
Rice, brown (cooked)	$\frac{1}{3}$ cup	65	1.6
Rice, white (cooked)	$\frac{1}{3}$ cup	68	0.5
Leafy Vegetables			
Broccoli	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	93	3.5
Brussels sprouts	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	78	2.3
Cabbage	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	85	1.6
Cauliflower	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	90	1.6
Celery	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	60	1.1
Lettuce	1 cup	55	0.8
Spinach, raw	1 cup	55	0.2
Turnip greens	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	93	3.5
Root Vegetables			
Beets	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	85	2.1
Carrots	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	78	2.4
Potatoes, baked	$\frac{1}{2}$ medium	75	1.9
Radishes	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	58	1.3
Sweet potatoes, baked	$\frac{1}{2}$ medium	75	2.1
Other Vegetables			
Beans, green	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	64	2.1
Beans, string	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	55	1.9
Cucumber	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	70	1.1
Eggplant	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	100	2.5
Lentils, cooked	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	100	3.7
Mushrooms	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	35	0.9
Onions	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	58	1.2
Tomatoes	1 small	100	1.5
Winter squash	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	120	3.5
Zucchini squash	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	65	2.0

Fiber Bar Recipe

Preheat oven to 350°. Lightly grease a 9" x 13" pan.

Dry ingredients: 1½ cups All Bran Cereal
1 cup flour
1 cup brown sugar
⅛ tsp. salt
⅛ tsp. cinnamon

Wet ingredients: 1 cup water
1 cup prunes
¾ cup fruit of choice for taste – sliced bananas,
chopped apples (skin is OK), apricot bits, etc.

Optional ingredients: ¼ cup wheat germ
¼ cup psyllium husk
¼ cup flax seed (whole or ground)
Walnuts, dates, raisins, etc. – for texture and
variety

Other: Jam or jelly

Directions:

Mix dry ingredients in large bowl; set aside. In blender, mix wet ingredients until mixture is thick like syrup. Use more or less fruit to get desired thickness.

Add wet ingredients into dry mixture; add more All Bran and flour to make batter thicker than cake batter, but not as thick as cookie dough. Add optional ingredients as desired.

Spread half of batter in pan, then spread with a thin layer of your favorite jam or jelly. (You can also create holes in the bottom layer so that the jam will ooze in.) Carefully spread the remaining batter over jam layer.

Place pan in the middle rack of the oven and bake for 20 minutes. Baking time will vary, depending on ingredients and oven type.

After removing from oven, allow to cool for 10 minutes, then dust with a light layer of powdered sugar. Cut into bars. Single portions freeze well in Zip-loc bags.

