

Preventing Constipation

Constipation means having painful or difficult bowel movements.

Many older adults have this problem. Constipation can be more than just uncomfortable. Serious constipation could put you in the hospital. Trying to stay regular and choosing healthy habits are worth the effort.

What you can do to prevent constipation

If you decide to make any of these changes, give yourself time. Your body might need several days to adjust.

Keep a regular routine:

- Try to go to the bathroom as soon as you feel the urge to have a bowel movement.
- If you have been constipated, take time for a bowel movement at the same time each day. Soon after a meal is usually best.
- Remember that everyone's body is different and needs its own routine.

Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of liquid each day:

- Fluids help make bowel movements easier.
- Water, juice, milk and soups are good choices.
- Regular coffee, tea, and cola soft drinks are not as good. The caffeine in these drinks takes fluid out of your body.
- Some people like to add fruit juice to their water. This gives flavour. Try lemon, orange, or cranberry juice.
- When the weather is hot, drink an extra glass of fluid each day.
- If you have heart, blood vessel, or kidney problems talk to your doctor before you change how much fluid you drink.



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What you can do to prevent constipation (cont'd)

Eat foods with fibre every day. Fibre helps waste move through your digestive system.

- Eat lots of whole grain breads and cereals.
- Eat fruits and vegetables.
- Eat prunes and prune juice. Prunes contain a natural laxative, as well as fibre.
- Bran has lots of fibre. An easy way to eat bran is to sprinkle it on soups, casseroles, yogurt or hot cereal. This can help if chewing is difficult for you.
- When you want to add fibre to your diet, slowly increase the amount you eat. Take 2 to 3 weeks, adding a little more each day. This will prevent you from bloating and having gas.
- Here are some good sources of fibre: natural bran; bran cereals; bran muffins; flour made from whole grains; breads made from whole grains; lentils, split peas and beans; whole grain cereals like Red River™, Shredded Wheat™, and Grapenut Flakes™; nuts; seeds; vegetables; and fruit.

Enjoy being active every day:

- Exercise helps prevent constipation. This includes walking, stretching, housework, swimming and riding a bicycle.
- Find some activities that you enjoy. You're more likely stay active if you have fun while you exercise.

Don't use too many laxatives:

- Use laxatives for a short time and only when you need them. If you have been using them for a long time, talk to your doctor.
- Using laxatives for a long time can cause constipation or make it worse. Your bowels might eventually need laxatives to work.



TIP
Physical activity helps prevent constipation. Get active.