

Constipation Management

In general, constipation means being unable to move your bowels for **three or more days**. It can also mean having bowel movements less often than is normal for you or having to push harder than usual. Being less active than usual, eating or drinking less than usual, or taking certain medications can cause constipation. Keeping your bowel movements regular and easy to pass is important.

- Eat at regular times each day.
- Try to take in 8-10 cups of liquid each day, especially if you add medications or fiber to prevent or treat constipation. Drink water, prune juice, warm juices, decaffeinated teas, and hot water with lemon juice and honey. Eat any food that is liquid at room temperature, such as flavored ice (Popsicles), gelatin, or ice cream.
- If you are at risk for or have constipation, establish a bowel plan to stay regular. This may include taking fiber supplements such as Citrucel, Metamucil, or any other preparation containing psyllium fiber.
- Recommended **Bowel Regimen**:
 - Start with docusate sodium (Colace), a stool softener: one tablet twice a day. This keeps the stool soft so it is easier to pass; it might require 12-72 hours to take effect.
 - You may add an osmotic laxative such as Miralax per instructions on the bottle or package. Miralax requires 1-3 days to take effect; Milk of Magnesia typically takes effect in 30 minutes to 6 hours. Remember to drink extra fluids.
 - If needed, add a stimulant laxative such as Senokot: 1-2 tablets twice a day (up to 8 tabs per day). Stimulant laxatives take effect in 6-12 hours but are not intended for long-term use unless directed by your physician. Follow package instructions.
- Use laxatives only on the advice of your physician. If you are on opioid pain management, a different regimen may be recommended – contact your clinic.
- Exercising regularly helps keep your digestive system healthy and active. The National Institutes of Health recommends getting about 20 to 30 minutes of exercise every day to help prevent constipation.

Dealing with Abdominal Gas

- Limit drinks and foods that cause gas, such as carbonated beverages, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumbers, dried beans, dried peas, and onions. Abdominal gas should disappear when bowel function returns to normal.
- Swallowing air can cause abdominal gas. To swallow less air: Drink without a straw, avoid chewing gum, and don't talk while eating.
- Consider taking an over-the-counter enzyme supplement such as Beano or Lactaid, or a simethicone product such as Gas-X.
- Activity will help eliminate the gas – take a walk!



Tips for Adding Fiber

Insoluble and soluble fibers are helpful for managing constipation. High-fiber foods include wheat bran, whole-grain breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables (raw and cooked with peels on), popcorn, and dried beans.

Caution: Make sure a high-fiber diet is recommended. If you have a low appetite, have problems chewing or swallowing, get full very quickly, or have ever been told that you need a low-fiber, low-residue diet, these foods might not be recommended.

Read food labels for “dietary fiber” content. The general daily recommendation is 25 grams for women and 38 grams for men. Talk to your dietitian – the right amount of fiber can be different for each person.

Fiber Content in Common Foods*

Food	Serving Size	Dietary Fiber (grams)
Breads and Cereals		
Bran cereals	½ cup	3-13
Popcorn	2 cups	5
Brown rice	½ cup	6
Whole-wheat bread	1 slice	1-2
Wheat bran, raw	¼ cup	6
Ground flax seed	2 Tbsp	4
Legumes		
Kidney beans [†]	½ cup	8
Navy beans [†]	½ cup	9
Vegetables		
Broccoli [†]	½ cup	4
Brussels sprouts [†]	½ cup	3
Carrots	½ cup	2
Corn	½ cup	5
Green peas	½ cup	3
Potato with skin	1 medium	3
Fruit		
Apple with peel	1 medium	4
Banana	1 medium	4
Blueberries	½ cup	2
Pear with skin	1 medium	5
Prunes	3	3
Orange	1 medium	3
Raisins	¼ cup	3
Strawberries	1 cup	3

*The general recommendation for fiber is 25 grams for women and 38 grams for men daily. Increase fiber gradually to prevent discomfort.

† These foods can cause abdominal gas.

Source: Adapted from Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Constipation Management handout for patient education.



Honey Bran Prune Muffins

High fiber in a tasty muffin.

2 cups wheat bran
2 cups all-purpose flour
⅛ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ cup light brown sugar
3 large eggs
1 cup prune juice
½ cup canola oil or applesauce
½ cup honey
1 cup raisins

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In a bowl, combine bran, flour, salt, baking soda, and brown sugar.

Add eggs, prune juice, oil or applesauce, and honey, mixing well. Stir in raisins. Pour batter into paper-lined muffin tins. Bake for 20 minutes.

Makes 18 muffins.

Each muffin contains 219 calories, 4 g protein, 38 g carbohydrate, 7 g fat, 4 g dietary fiber, 103 mg sodium.

Source: Eating Well Through Cancer, a 2006 cookbook by Holly Clegg & G. Miletello, M.D.