

Constipation

Causes and tips

Causes of Constipation

- A change in the foods you eat and in your eating schedule can affect your bowel movements.
- Some prescription pain medicines can slow the process of digesting food.
- A decrease in your daily activity also slows food digestion.

Tips to Lessen Constipation

- **Take the stool softener medicine** that your doctor recommended, such as Colace (docusate sodium). You can buy this without a prescription at a drugstore or online.
- **Increase how much 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.** The best source of fiber is breakfast cereal with 5 or more grams of fiber in a serving. Some of these are Spoon Size Shredded Wheat, All-Bran, and Oat Bran. Fiber content is shown on the Nutrition Facts label on the cereal box.

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



Eating high-fiber foods is one way to help ease constipation.



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

- **Try to have meals at the same time each day.** Eating breakfast at the same time every day helps get your bowels on a regular schedule.
- **If you are allowed to drink coffee, have some at breakfast.** Coffee stimulates your bowels. Decaf coffee will work, 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 and go.
- **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 sit on the toilet.

Laxatives

Sometimes after an operation, a laxative is needed to help get things started. You can buy these over the counter (without a prescription) at any drugstore.

- **Milk of Magnesia liquid:** Works overnight.
- **Biscodyl 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.
- Feel dizzy or lightheaded when you stand up.

Questions?

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