

COPING WITH CONSTIPATION

What is constipation?

Constipation is the infrequent and difficult passage of small hard faeces (stools). It can often occur when you are unwell.

Some medicines, particularly those prescribed to help with pain, can make you more likely to become constipated. Not drinking enough, not eating enough fibre containing foods, and being inactive can all make constipation worse.

Tips on how to prevent constipation

- Try to walk around and keep as mobile and active as possible.
- It is important to eat regularly throughout the day. For example, breakfast, lunch and evening meal, or more frequently if this suits your appetite.
- Have plenty to drink. Aim for 6 - 9 cups (3 - 4 pints, 1½ - 2 litres) of fluid each day. Water, tea, coffee, fruit juice, squash, milk, fizzy drinks and hot chocolate all count as suitable drinks.
- If you have been prescribed a laxative take it regularly.
- Try to have more fibre in your diet.

What is fibre?

Fibre is present in all plant based foods such as vegetables, fruit, nuts and cereals.

Fibre helps to prevent constipation because it cannot be digested. It passes through the intestine, absorbing fluid like a sponge to help add bulk to your faeces. Soft bulky faeces are easier to push out of the body.

How can I increase the fibre in my diet?

Below is a list of foods that are high in fibre. Over the next 2 – 3 weeks, gradually swap your usual foods for higher fibre varieties. It is important to increase the fibre in your diet gradually as doing so too quickly can lead to bloating and colic.

Try to include a source of fibre at each of your meals.

There is no need to add natural bran to your diet. The foods suggested should provide enough fibre.

Ensure you drink plenty so that the fibre can work properly.

High fibre choices

- **Bread**
Choose wholemeal, Hi-Bran, granary or soft grain breads.
- **Breakfast Cereals**
Wholegrain cereals e.g. Weetabix, Bran Flakes, All Bran, Muesli, Shredded Wheat and porridge, or look out for cereals that say they are made with “wholegrain”.
- **Biscuits and Crackers**
Wholewheat biscuits e.g. digestives and Hobnobs, muesli bars, fig rolls, Garibaldi, fruit shortcakes, flapjacks. Wholewheat crackers and oatcakes.
- **Rice and Pasta**
Brown rice and wholewheat pasta are widely available, although they take slightly longer to cook.
- **Vegetables and Pulses**
Include generous helpings of vegetables and salads in your diet. They may be fresh, frozen or tinned. Pulses are good sources of fibre e.g. lentils, beans and peas. Tinned varieties are quick and easy to use. Boil potatoes in their skins or eat the skin on jacket potatoes.
- **Fruit**
Use fresh, frozen, tinned or dried fruit.

Ideas

- Chop a banana or dried apricots on to your breakfast cereal.
- Have a mini box or handful of raisins as a snack.
- Enjoy chunks of pear or tinned peaches as a refreshing dessert.
- Try rhubarb or apple crumble for a delicious pudding.
- Plan to have 2 different vegetables with your main meal.
- Add extra vegetables e.g. mushrooms, sweetcorn, chopped swede to your pasta sauce, casserole or pizza.
- Try a chunky home made soup with bread as a filling snack meal.
- Enjoy a vegetarian main course dish e.g. vegetable lasagne, mushroom stroganoff for a change.
- For speedy and colourful vegetables keep peas and sweetcorn in your freezer.
- Try lentil soup with crusty bread.
- Have baked beans on toast for a quick lunch/supper.
- A bowl of wholegrain cereal makes a nutritious snack any time of the day.

Advice for a poor appetite

Following a higher fibre diet can lead to feeling full more quickly when eating as your meals will be ‘bulkier’. This is not a concern if you are eating well, but if your appetite is poor or you are losing weight, ask your nurse to refer you to the dietitian for further advice.