Constipation

Constipation happens when you cannot move your bowels, when you have bowel movements less often than usual, or when you have to push harder than usual to move your bowels. Constipation can be painful and uncomfortable.

Possible Causes of Constipation

Causes of constipation include:

- Being less active than normal for you
- Eating or drinking less than your usual amounts
- Chemotherapy
- Taking certain medications (especially medications to ease nausea or pain)
- Taking calcium or iron supplements

WORD OF CAUTION

If you are taking narcotic pain medications, these tips alone aren't enough to prevent constipation—you should also take a stool softener or a gentle laxative. Talk to your health care team about what they recommend.

Tips to Prevent or Manage Constipation

- Try to eat at about the same time every day.
- At breakfast, drink a hot beverage or eat hot cereal to stimulate a bowel movement.
- Drink at least 8 to 10 cups of fluid per day—especially as you add more fiber to your diet or if your medications increase the risk of constipation. Drink often throughout the day. Try different drinks for variety.
- Add fiber slowly to your diet by adding 1 or 2 high-fiber foods a day. To increase the amount of fiber in your diet, try the following:
  - Eat more of foods with fiber, such as beans, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.
  - Review the Nutrition Facts label and look for foods with more than 3 grams of fiber per serving.
  - Choose a high-fiber cereal (like bran flakes) for breakfast every day.
  - Sprinkle a tablespoon or more of wheat bran or flaxseed on cereals. You can also try adding these to smoothies or casseroles.
  - Try using a prune pudding sauce (see the Prune Pudding recipe on the next page).
- Increase your amount of daily physical activity. Ask a member of your health care team if you need information about the types of exercises you can do or how much exercise you can do.

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Tips to Prevent or Manage Constipation *(continued)*

- Give yourself enough time to have a bowel movement—try not to rush.
- Ask a member of your health care team before using any over-the-counter stool softeners or laxatives, herbal supplements, fiber supplements, or probiotics to treat constipation.
- Make sure you are taking your prescribed medications as directed.

Prune Pudding

3 cups whole dried, pitted prunes (soaked in water until soft)
1 cup prune juice
1 cup plus 1 tablespoon applesauce
7 tablespoons bran cereal

Puree prunes and prune juice in a blender. Add applesauce and bran cereal to the blender. Blend well and refrigerate before serving. Try ¼ cup servings once or twice a day.

Yield: About 20 ¼-cup servings
Nutrition information per serving: 82 calories, 1 gram protein, 5 grams fiber

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