

Preventing Constipation: Your Daily Guide

Fundamentals • Nutrition & Elimination

Constipation means hard stools, straining, or fewer than 3 bowel movements a week. Simple daily habits keep your stools soft and regular.

Eat more fiber

- Aim for about 25 grams a day for women and 38 grams for men (21 and 30 grams after age 50).
- Choose whole grains, bran cereal, beans, fruit with the skin, vegetables, and prunes.
- Add fiber slowly over a few weeks to avoid gas and bloating.

Drink fluids

- Drink about 8 cups (2 liters) of fluid a day, unless your provider gives you a limit.
- A warm drink in the morning helps your bowels move.

Move every day

- Walk or stay active every day, as you are able.

Make a bathroom routine

- Go as soon as you feel the urge. Do not hold it.
- Sit on the toilet at the same time each day, after breakfast or another meal.
- Rest your feet on a small stool and lean forward. Do not strain.

Check your medicines

- Opioid pain pills, iron pills, and some antacids cause constipation. Do not stop them. Ask your provider for a plan.
- Take fiber powder such as psyllium (Metamucil) with a full glass of water.
- Use laxatives only as your provider or pharmacist advises.

Call your provider today if you have

- Blood in or on your stool, or black stool
- Weight loss you cannot explain
- No bowel movement in 3 days, or a lasting change in your bowel habits
- Watery stool leaking out when you feel blocked up

Call 911 or your local emergency number if you have

- Severe belly pain with vomiting, and you cannot pass gas or stool
- A hard, swollen belly with vomiting
- Heavy bleeding from your rectum, or black stool with dizziness or fainting
- Fever with severe belly pain

This handout supports, not replaces, advice from your own nurse or doctor.

Online: nclexpace.com/patient-education/constipation-prevention/patient

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