



Bowel Management

How to manage constipation and prevent bowel accidents

A bowel program helps to manage constipation or bowel accidents, regardless of the cause.

What can cause bowel changes for people with multiple sclerosis?

- Change in eating habits.
- Decrease in activity.
- A lesion in the spinal cord.
- Side effects of a drug.

What causes bowel accidents?

- Stool is too soft or liquid.
- Lack of sensation to have a bowel movement.
- No regular time or schedule for bowel movement.
- Not enough dietary fiber.

What causes constipation?

- Not enough dietary fiber.
- Not drinking enough liquid to keep your stool soft.
- No regular time or schedule for bowel movement.
- Lack of exercise, which slows the movement of your intestines.

Steps to Establish Regular Bowel Elimination

It may take several days or weeks to get your bowels on a regular elimination schedule. These steps can help:

1. *Eat a diet high in fiber.*

Sources of fiber include breakfast cereal, fruits, and vegetables. The fiber adds the necessary bulk to your stool and helps to hold in water to soften it.

If your current diet does not contain much fiber, gradually adding a fiber supplement such as *Metamucil* or *Perdiem* will be helpful. Start with 1 teaspoon every other day for 1 week, increasing to 1 tablespoon every other day for 1 week, with a goal of 2 tablespoons every day in 8 to 12 ounces of liquid. Increase slowly to avoid gas and cramping.

2. *Drink a warm liquid with the meal before your bowel movement.*

This starts the normal reflexes working in your bowels. You should also drink about 8 glasses of fluid a day.

3. *Try to have meals at the same time each day.*

This helps get your bowels back on a regular schedule.

4. *Select the best time in your day to have a bowel movement.*

Most people feel the urge to have a bowel movement about 20 minutes after a meal.

5. *Sit on the toilet for 10 to 20 minutes after finishing the meal.*

Do not strain to have a bowel movement. If you are unable to have a bowel movement, forget it and try again the next day. It is not necessary to have one each day.

6. *If you do not have a bowel movement in 2 to 3 days, you will need to add a glycerine or Dulcolax suppository to your bowel program.*

Insert the suppository in your rectum after the meal, being sure it is touching the inside of your rectum to stimulate the lower bowel and produce a bowel movement. You may want a prescription for this, as well as one for a stool softener such as *Colace*.

Laxatives

Do not take a laxative unless recommended by your health care provider. Laxatives taken on a daily or regular basis cause bowel dependence and stop working after a while.

- **Glycerine** and **Dulcolax suppositories** are not laxatives.
- **Milk of magnesia tablets** and **liquid** and **Dulcolax tablets** are laxatives.

Fiber regulates your bowels by holding water in your stool, and adding bulk to either speed things up or slow them down.

How to Add More Fiber to Your Diet

Include more high-fiber foods in your diet. Start reading labels of the foods that you eat. Dietary fiber content is listed on the Nutrition Facts label, which appears on all packaged foods. See the example of the cereal box label on page 4. Also see the chart on pages 4 and 5, which lists common foods and their fiber content.

When you increase the amount of fiber you eat, you may have more gas and some cramping. To avoid this, increase your fiber gradually, so your body has time to adjust to the additional fiber. **You also need to drink more liquids**, or the added fiber can actually make you constipated. Fiber can absorb more than its own weight in water.

Diet Tips to Manage Constipation

What you eat and when you eat have an influence on your bowel movements.

- **Have meals at the same time each day.** It helps to eat breakfast at the same time every day. This helps get your bowels back on a regular schedule.
- **Do not skip meals.** Eating stimulates the bowels. Breakfast is especially important because it is the first meal of the day. If you are not a breakfast eater, then take an over-the-counter fiber remedy instead.
- **Drink something warm with breakfast.** If you are allowed to drink coffee, have some with breakfast. If you are not a coffee drinker, then have some other warm drink with breakfast.
- **Exercise each day.** Exercise or walking helps increase the movement of food through your bowels.

Sample Nutrition Label

This label shows the nutritional information for "Fiber One" bran cereal by General Mills.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1/2 cup (1 NLEA serving) (30g)	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 59	Calories from Fat 7
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 1g	1%
Saturated Fat 0g	1%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 129mg	5%
Total Carbohydrate 24g	8%
Dietary Fiber 14g	58%
Sugars 0g	
Protein 2g	
Vitamin A 0%	Vitamin C 10%
Calcium 10%	Iron 25%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.	
NutritionData.com	

Dietary Fiber in Foods	Amount	Weight (grams)	Fiber (grams)
Bread and Crackers			
Graham cracker	2 squares	14.2	1.4
Pumpernickel bread	3/4 slice	24	1.4
Rye bread	1 slice	25	0.8
Whole wheat bread	1 slice	25	1 to 3
Whole wheat cracker	6 crackers	19.8	2.2
Whole wheat roll	3/4 roll	21	1.2
Cereals			
All Bran 100%	1/3 cup	28	8.4
Bran Chex	1/2 cup	21	4.1
Corn Bran	1/2 cup	21	4.4
Corn Flakes	3/4 cup	21	2.6
Grapenuts Flakes	2/3 cup	21	2.5
Grapenuts	3 Tbsp.	21	2.7
Kashi Good Friends	2/3 cup	35	12.0
Oatmeal	3/4 pkg.	21	2.5
Shredded Wheat	1 biscuit	21	2.8
Wheaties	3/4 cup	21	2.6
Fruit			
Apple	1/2 cup	83	2.0
Apricot	2	72	1.4
Banana	1/2 medium	54	1.5
Blackberries	3/4 cup	108	6.7
Cantaloupe	1 cup	160	1.6
Cherries	10 large	68	1.1
Dates, dried	2	18	1.6
Figs, dried	1 medium	20	3.7
Grapes, white	10	50	0.5
Grapefruit	1/3	87	0.8
Honeydew melon	1 cup	170	1.5
Orange	1 small	78	1.6
Peach	1 medium	100	2.3
Pear	1/2 medium	82	2.0
Pineapple	1/2	78	0.8
Plums	3 small	85	1.8
Prunes, dried	2	15	2.4
Raisins	1 1/2 Tbsp.	14	1.0
Strawberries	1 cup	143	3.1
Tangerine	1 large	101	2.0
Watermelon	1 cup	160	1.4

	Amount	Weight (grams)	Fiber (grams)
High-Fiber Supplement			
Fibermed	2 wafers	35.4	10.0
Meat, Milk, Eggs			
Beef, chicken, pork, turkey	1 oz.	28	0
Cheese	$\frac{3}{4}$ oz.	21	0
Eggs	3 large	99	0
Fish	2 oz.	56	0
Milk	1 cup	240	0
Rice			
Rice, brown (cooked)	$\frac{1}{3}$ cup	65	1.6
Rice, white (cooked)	$\frac{1}{3}$ cup	68	0.5
Leafy Vegetables			
Broccoli	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	93	3.5
Brussels sprouts	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	78	2.3
Cabbage	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	85	1.6
Cauliflower	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	90	1.6
Celery	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	60	1.1
Lettuce	1 cup	55	0.8
Spinach, raw	1 cup	55	0.2
Turnip greens	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	93	3.5
Root Vegetables			
Beets	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	85	2.1
Carrots	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	78	2.4
Potatoes, baked	$\frac{1}{2}$ medium	75	1.9
Radishes	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	58	1.3
Sweet potatoes, baked	$\frac{1}{2}$ medium	75	2.1
Other Vegetables			
Beans, green	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	64	2.1
Beans, string	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	55	1.9
Cucumber	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	70	1.1
Eggplant	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	100	2.5
Lentils, cooked	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	100	3.7
Mushrooms	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	35	0.9
Onions	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	58	1.2
Tomatoes	1 small	100	1.5
Winter squash	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	120	3.5
Zucchini squash	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	65	2.0

Questions?

Call 206-598-3344

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Western Multiple Sclerosis Center staff are available to help Monday to Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Western Multiple Sclerosis Center:
206-598-3344

Call the Western Multiple Sclerosis Center If:

- It has been 5 days and you have not had a bowel movement.
- You have had diarrhea or vomiting for 24 hours.
- Your stomach becomes hard or distended.

If You Need Prescription Refills

Call **Refill Authorization** at 206-598-4398 if you need to refill any prescriptions. Allow 24 to 48 hours for prescriptions to be refilled.

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
MEDICAL CENTER
UW Medicine

Western Multiple Sclerosis Center

Box 356157
1959 N.E. Pacific St. Seattle, WA 98195
206-598-3344