



# Constipation After Surgery

Constipation is a common problem after surgery. It can be prevented or managed with a few simple steps:

- Take a stool softener.
- Eat a diet high in fiber.
- Increase fluids.
- Do light physical activity.

## What causes constipation after surgery?

These things can lead to constipation after surgery:

- A change in your regular eating habits.
- A decrease in fluid intake.
- Narcotic pain medicine.
- A decrease in your daily activity.

## Tips to Lessen Constipation

- **Take the stool softener** that your doctor prescribed as directed (Miralax, Colace, or Docusate).
- **Eat a diet high in fiber.** Some high-fiber foods are breakfast cereal with 5 grams or more per serving (Shredded Wheat, All-Bran, Fiber One), peanuts, whole wheat bread, parsnips, grapefruit, cantaloupe, carrots, prunes, peas, beans, split peas, pears, and mangos.
- **Increase the amount of fluids you drink.** This will keep your stool soft. Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day. Signs that you are not drinking enough are:
  - You are urinating less than normal.
  - Your urine is dark in color.
  - You get dizzy or lightheaded when you stand up.
- **Try to eat at the same time each day.** Eating breakfast at the same time every day can help your bowels get back on schedule.
- **Drink coffee or prune juice with breakfast.** Decaf coffee works as well as caffeinated.
- **Exercise or walk** to stimulate your bowels.

## Questions?

Call the Urology and Urogynecology Clinic at 206-598-5960, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

### After hours and on weekends and holidays:

- If you are a patient of **Dr. Michael Fialkow** or **Dr. Gretchen Lentz**, call 206-598-6190 and ask for the **Gynecology Resident** on call to be paged.
- If you are a patient of **Dr. Jane Miller**, call 206-598-6190 and ask for the **Urology Resident** on call to be paged.

- **Do not delay getting to the bathroom.** If you feel the urge to have a bowel movement, head to the bathroom.
- **Laxatives** can be useful to get things started. Milk of magnesia works overnight. You can buy this at a drugstore without a prescription.

## When to Call Your Doctor

To prevent problems with your healing process after surgery call your doctor if:

- You have to strain hard to have a bowel movement.
- It has been 3 days since your surgery, you have tried the “Tips to Lessen Constipation” in this handout, and you still have not had a bowel movement.
- You are nauseated and throwing up.
- You feel dizzy or lightheaded when you stand up.

Please call the Urology and Urogynecology Clinic at 206-598-5960 if you have any questions or concerns.

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON  
**MEDICAL CENTER**  
UW Medicine

**Urology and  
Urogynecology Clinic**

Box 356158

1959 N.E. Pacific St. Seattle, WA 98195  
206-598-5960