**Constipation**

*Causes and tips*

**Causes of Constipation**

- A change in the foods you eat and in your eating schedule can affect your bowel movements.
- Some prescription pain medicines can slow the process of digesting food.
- A decrease in your daily activity also slows food digestion.

**Tips to Lessen Constipation**

- **Take the stool softener medicine** that your doctor recommended, such as Colace (docusate sodium). You can buy this without a prescription at a drugstore or online.
- **Increase how much fluid** you drink. Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day, plus the liquids you drink with your meals. Signs that you are not drinking enough are:
  - You are urinating less than normal.
  - Your urine is dark-colored.
  - You feel dizzy when you stand up.
- **Eat high-fiber foods.** The best source of fiber is breakfast cereal with 5 or more grams of fiber in a serving. Some of these are Spoon Size Shredded Wheat, All-Bran, and Oat Bran. Fiber content is shown on the Nutrition Facts label on the cereal box.
  
  Other high-fiber foods are dry and unsalted peanuts, whole wheat bread, parsnips, grapefruit, cantaloupe, cooked carrots, prunes, green peas, baked beans, kidney beans, and split peas.
• **Try to have meals at the same time each day.** Eating breakfast at the same time every day helps get your bowels on a regular schedule.

• **If you are allowed to drink coffee, have some at breakfast.** Coffee stimulates your bowels. Decaf coffee will work, too.

• **Drink cold or warm prune juice** with breakfast.

• **Walk or do other light exercise after breakfast** to increase the movement of food through your body.

• **Most people feel the urge to have a bowel movement about 20 minutes after a meal.** If you feel the urge, try and go.

• **Do not just sit on the toilet and read a book.** Sitting on the toilet for a long time can cause painful swelling or hemorrhoids. Wait until you feel the urge to have a bowel movement, and then go sit on the toilet.

**Laxatives**

Sometimes after an operation, a laxative is needed to help get things started. You can buy these over the counter (without a prescription) at any drugstore.

• **Milk of Magnesia liquid:** Works overnight.

• **Biscodyl rectal suppositories:** Work in about 20 minutes.

• **Fleets enema:** Works in about 15 minutes.

**Call Your Healthcare Provider If You:**

• Had a Cesarean birth and trying these tips for 3 days has not helped you have a bowel movement.

• Are sick to your stomach and throwing up.

• Feel dizzy or lightheaded when you stand up.

---

**Questions?**

Your questions are important. If you have questions about constipation, call your healthcare provider during office hours.