

Constipation After Surgery

Causes and prevention

This handout explains why patients often become constipated after surgery. It includes tips to help avoid or lessen the problem.

What causes constipation after surgery?

These things can lead to constipation after surgery:

- A change in your eating habits
- Lower fluid intake
- Taking opioid pain medicine
- Less 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.



Eating high-fiber foods can help prevent constipation.

- **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.
- **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.

Questions?

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

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call the Urology and Urogynecology Clinic at 206.598.5960.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.6190 and ask to page the Gynecology or Urology resident on call.