



## Constipation

*This information along with other educational material is available on our website at [www.WatsonClinic.com/GynOnc](http://www.WatsonClinic.com/GynOnc)*

### **What is constipation?**

Constipation means infrequent bowel movements such that you are not able to have bowel movements on a regular basis. Stools become hard and get trapped in the colon.

### **What causes constipation?**

Constipation can be caused by many different things. Lack of exercise, poor fluid intake, dietary fiber, medications, and medical conditions such as diabetes, Parkinson's disease, and hypothyroidism can all contribute to constipation. Pain medications (especially narcotics), antihistamines, iron supplements, and some blood pressure medications are among the many medications that can result in less frequent bowel movements.

### **What symptoms are associated with constipation?**

Straining during a bowel movement, hard stools, a feeling of being bloated, and a decrease in appetite are very common. If constipation is not treated, abdominal pressure and pain can occur, hemorrhoids can develop, and you may have bleeding when you move your bowels.

### **What can be done to prevent constipation?**

Eating a high fiber diet and drinking plenty of fluids (8-10 glasses daily) can help prevent constipation. Raw fruits and vegetables or those cooked with the skins have high fiber content. Whole grain breads, bran cereals, oatmeal and dried fruits are also good sources of fiber. A table showing the fiber content of many foods is included on the back of this handout to assist you in keeping track of your fiber intake and you can also get this type of information on product labels. You should aim for 20-30 grams of fiber every day. You may also find Metamucil, Citrucel, or Fibercon to be helpful.

### **What can be done to treat constipation?**

Prunes are a natural fiber laxative. A glass of prune juice twice daily can help bowel movements become more regular. A regular program of exercise is also important; a short walk daily helps the intestinal reflexes and improves the ability to have regular bowel movements.

There are also medicines available to relieve constipation. There are many different types of medications that may be purchased over the counter at your local pharmacy. However, all laxatives and stool softeners should be used with care. Some of these medications can cause your bowels to become dependent on them for normal function. Milk of Magnesia, Dulcolax (tablets or suppositories), a Fleet's enema, or mineral oil may help acute constipation, but constipation will recur if you do not change your diet (high fiber and plenty of fluid) and exercise habits as mentioned above.

We have found Miralax to be very helpful for women that have chronic problems with constipation. Long term use is safe for most patients, and it has minimal side effects. We recommend that you start with one scoop (17 grams) in your beverage of choice daily and then make adjustments as needed to keep your bowels at the consistency and frequency you desire. If your bowel movements become too loose or you develop diarrhea, you should avoid Miralax for a day or two, but then resume the Miralax at a lower dose (for example, ½ scoop daily or stay at one scoop but take it every other day). If you do not move your bowels for three days, take one of the laxatives mentioned above, and then increase the dose of Miralax (for example, two scoops daily). Keep making adjustments until you are happy with your bowel function. You will eventually determine the most appropriate "recipe" for you and your lifestyle.

### **What if none of this works?**

If you find that the methods and medications mentioned above are not effective for you or you do not have a bowel movement for four days, please call the office so that we can try to assist you further or request a consultation from a Gastroenterology specialist.



FRUITS	SERVING SIZE	FIBER (GRAMS)
Pear	1 medium	5.1
Blueberries	1 cup	3.5
Apple, with skin	1 medium	3.3
Strawberries	1 cup	3.3
Peaches, dried	3 halves	3.2
Orange	1 medium	3.1
Raisins	1.5-ounce box	1.6
<b>PASTA, CEREAL, &amp; BREAD</b>		
Spaghetti, whole-wheat	1 cup	6.3
Bran flakes	3/4 cup	5.1
Oatmeal	1 cup	4.0
Bread, whole-wheat	1 slice	1.9
<b>NUTS</b>		
Almonds	24 nuts	3.3
Peanuts	28 nuts	2.3
Cashews	18 nuts	0.9
<b>VEGETABLES</b>		
Black beans	1 cup	15.0
Lima beans	1 cup	13.2
Baked beans, canned	1 cup	10.4
Peas	1 cup	8.8
Brussels sprouts	1 cup	6.4
Turnip greens, boiled	1 cup	5.0
Potato, baked with skin	1 medium	4.4
Corn	1 cup	4.2
Carrot	1 medium	2.0

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