

# Nutritional Management of Constipation

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Constipation means being unable to move your bowels, having bowel movements less often than is normal for you, or having to push harder to move your bowels than you have in the past. It may be a side effect of the chemotherapy that you are on, or a result of the medications you are taking to manage nausea and pain. Constipation can also be caused by being less active and eating or drinking less. However, there are many things that can be done to help with bowel regularity.

It is important that you maintain open communication with your doctors and nurses. Use laxatives only at the advice of your doctor, and contact your healthcare team if you have not had a bowel movement in 3 or more days.

- It is very important to stay well-hydrated (8-10 cups of liquid each day). Prune juice, warmed juices or ciders, teas, and hot lemonade may offer relief. If you are struggling to maintain your weight, talk to the nutritionist about high-calorie supplements and drinks that contain fiber.
- Eat at regular times each day. Meal skipping or eating less often can decrease bowel function and cause constipation.
- If you are having problems with gas, eat slowly (take time to eat) and drink without using straws. It also helps to avoid chewing gum. These changes will lessen the amount of air that is swallowed at mealtimes, thus decreasing gas production.

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- Be as active as possible. Even if you are just taking a light walk once a day, activity can help establish regular bowel pattern

### **When to Add Fiber**

- If you are not having nausea, gas or bloating, try to include high-fiber and “bulky” foods. Review the list of high fiber foods in this handout. Eat a good breakfast, including a hot drink and high fiber foods at the start of your day!
- If gas becomes a problem, limit carbonated drinks, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumbers, dried beans, peas, and onions.

### **Increase the fiber you are eating gradually**

Start by adding in 5 grams of fiber every 2-3 days until you reach a goal of 25-30 grams fiber daily. Increasing your fiber intake quicker than this can cause discomfort such as increased gas or bloating. If you are already eating the goal amount (25-30 grams) of fiber, further increasing your fiber intake will likely provide no additional benefit. See chart on page 3.

### High Fiber Foods to Choose More Often

	Serving Size	Amount of Fiber (grams)		Serving Size	Amount of Fiber (grams)
<b>Grains</b>			<b>Fruits</b>		
Bran Cereal	1/2 cup	3 to 13	Pear with skin	1 medium	5
Raw Bran	1/4 cup	6	Apple with skin	1 medium	4
Brown Rice	1/2 cup	3 to 6	Banana	1 medium	3
Popcorn	2 cups popped	5	Prunes	3	3
Whole-wheat Bread	1 slice	2 to 5	Orange	1 medium	3
<b>Vegetables</b>			Raisins	1/4 cup	3
Corn	1/2 cup	5	Strawberries	1 cup	3
Broccoli	1/2 cup	4	Blueberries	1/2 cup	2
Brussel Sprouts	1/2 cup	3	<b>Legumes</b>		
Potato with skin	1 medium	4	Navy beans	1/2 cup	9
Green peas	1/2 cup	3	Kidney beans	1/2 cup	8
Carrots	1/2 cup	2			

### Tips for increasing your fiber intake

- Choose **whole** grain breads and cereals. Look for choices with 100% whole wheat, rye, oats or bran as the first or second ingredient.
- Have brown or wild rice instead of white rice or potatoes.
- Try new grains such as barley, oats, farro, kamut, and quinoa.
- Choose fresh fruits and vegetables with peels or skins on.
- Eat more beans and legumes such as baked beans.
- Look at food labels and try to choose foods with 3 or more grams of fiber per serving.

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## Recipes to Help Manage Constipation

### **Fruit N' Bran\***

3 parts bran (wheat bran or 100% bran best)  
2 parts applesauce  
1 part prune juice

Mix together. Eat three times a day, or as needed. Good on toast, as well.

\*recipe obtained from the American Dietetic Association.

### **Fruit Paste**

½ pound pitted prunes	½ pound raisins
½ cup lemon juice	½ pound dried figs
½ cup brown sugar	½ package Senna Tea* (3-4 oz. Pkgs.)

Steep tea for 5 minutes in 3 ½ cups of boiling water. Strain. Cut the fruit into small pieces. Add the fruit to 1 cup of the tea, and let it boil for 5 minutes. Add the sugar and lemon juice. Cool the mixture, and put it into a blender or food processor. When blended, place the mixture in a plastic container with a lid and place in the refrigerator. Take 1-2 tablespoons daily with a full glass of water. Because this recipe makes a large amount, you may want to cut it in half.

\*Senna tea, or Smooth Moves® may be drank alone to help manage constipation.

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### **High Fiber Snack Ideas:**

- make a trail mix with dried fruit, raisins, nuts, and sunflower seeds
- have a bowl of oatmeal with berries and wheat germ stirred in with it
- warm up a can of lentil or black bean soup...you can add cheese or sour cream for flavor and more calories

### **A Word About Supplements**

If you are taking calcium or iron supplements, it may be helpful to take smaller amounts several times per day. Check with your health care provider if this is an option.

This document is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Our aim is to promote active participation in your care and treatment by providing information and education. Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options should be discussed with your physician.

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