

# Constipation

**Constipation** is defined as having fewer than three bowel movements a week or stools that are hard, dry and small making them difficult to pass. Constipation may be accompanied by a feeling of pain or bloating in the abdomen. Normal bowel movements may occur as often as three times a day or three times a week depending on the person. Going longer than 3 days without a bowel movement is too long. After 3 days; the stool becomes harder and more difficult to pass.

**Causes of Constipation:** Diets low in fiber, lack of physical activity, some medications, changes in daily routine, ignoring the urge to have a bowel movement, and inadequate water intake.

**Constipation Treatments:** One way to avoid constipation is getting enough fiber in your diet. Fiber adds bulk to the stool making it easier to pass. Gradually increase the amount of fiber in your diet until you are getting 25 to 30 grams of fiber daily.

## Good sources of fiber include:

Examples of Foods That Have Fiber	
Beans, cereals, and breads	Fiber
½ cup of beans (navy, pinto, kidney, etc.), cooked	6.2–9.6 grams
½ cup of shredded wheat, ready-to-eat cereal	2.7–3.8 grams
½ cup of 100% bran, ready-to-eat cereal	9.1 grams
1 small oat bran muffin	3.0 grams
1 whole-wheat English muffin	4.4 grams
Fruits	
1 small apple, with skin	3.6 grams
1 medium pear, with skin	5.5 grams
½ cup of raspberries	4.0 grams
½ cup of stewed prunes	3.8 grams
Vegetables	
½ cup of winter squash, cooked	2.9 grams
1 medium sweet potato, baked in skin	3.8 grams
½ cup of green peas, cooked	3.5–4.4 grams
1 small potato, baked, with skin	3.0 grams
½ cup of mixed vegetables, cooked	4.0 grams
½ cup of broccoli, cooked	2.6–2.8 grams
½ cup of greens (spinach, collards, turnip greens), cooked	2.5–3.5 grams

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010*.

Limit foods that are high in fat and low in fiber, like cheese and other dairy products, processed foods and meat. They can make constipation worse. Try to drink at least 8 glasses of water a day. Regular exercise can help keep your bowels moving too.

**Medications:** OTC medications such as Metamucil, Colace, and Senokot may help in relieving constipation.

Sources and/or additional resources:

NIDDK: <http://www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/constipation/index.aspx>

WebMD: <http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/digestive-diseases-constipation>

If you are a registered Millersville University student and you have questions or you need to make an appointment, please call Millersville University Health Services at 871-5250.