

Managing Constipation

Constipation is generally some degree of difficulty emptying your bowel. This can also result in hard, dry stools that are difficult to pass and can be very painful. Constipation can cause excess wind, poor appetite, tiredness and nausea.

How do I know if my bowels are regular?

Everyone has different bowel movements, so it's about what feels normal for you.

Remember, even if you are eating less food your bowel movements should still be regular and easy to pass.

Aim for a soft bowel movement, every 1-2 days.

If you have not had a bowel movement for 3 or more days, and this continues to persist, see your health professional.

What causes constipation?

Medical reasons:

- Diseases that affect the gut
- Some medications:
 - Strong pain relief including codeine, oxycodone (e.g. Endone) or morphine
 - Anti-nausea medication including ondansetron (e.g. Zofran)
 - Antidepressants
 - Antihistamines to treat allergies or asthma

Other causes of constipation:

- Older age
- Not drinking enough
- Not eating enough fibre
- Eating less food
- Less exercise or mobility
- Hospital stays

How do I manage my constipation?

- 1 **Eat more fibre** – eating fibre helps you to be regular
- 2 **Drink up** – try to drink at least 6 glasses of fluid each day
- 3 **Get moving** – light exercise such as walking can help get your bowel moving
- 4 **Ask for help** – talk to your doctor about taking a stool softener or a laxative to get things going

How do I get more fibre in my diet?

Try to have these every day and you will have the balance just right.

2 serves of whole fruit, preferably with skin



1 serve = 1 medium banana, ½ cup berries, 1 medium apple

3-5 serves of vegetables



1 serve = ½ cup of cooked vegetables, ½-1 cup of salad greens, 1 medium carrot

4-6 serves of grains, preferably high fibre or whole grain



1 serve = ⅔ cup of breakfast cereal, ½ cup of cooked porridge,
½ cup of cooked brown rice, 1 slice wholemeal or grain bread

1 serve of nuts or legumes



1 serve = ¾-1 cup of cooked legumes, small handful of nuts

Complement with lean protein, some dairy and healthy fats.
Don't forget to drink water as you increase your fibre intake.

Based on serving sizes from the Australian Guide to HealthyEating, 2013. New Zealand serving sizes are similar.

Health professional notes

These resources are not meant to replace dietary advice provided by your doctor or dietitian. Please consult with your doctor or dietitian before making changes to your diet or physical activity routine.

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