



## Managing constipation

This information is intended as a guide to help you deal with your constipation until you can talk to your doctor. **It is not for patients on a low residue diet.** It is not intended to replace medical advice. If you have lost your appetite and you are losing weight, this may not be the right information for you, so please talk to your doctor. Surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy and some medicines are all treatments which may change your bowel habits and may cause constipation. It is important that you carry on taking your medicines, but please talk to your doctor about your symptoms.

### Managing your diet

It is important for everybody to eat fibre in their diet. If you have constipation you may benefit from eating more fibre. The following tips may also help:

#### 1. Eat a balanced diet

Make sure that you eat more fibre each day than usual. Fibre is the name given to parts of plant foods that we cannot completely digest. Eating fibre relieves and prevents constipation. If you are not used to eating fibre, then introduce it gradually.

Foods which are high in fibre include the following:

- Wholegrain breakfast cereals
- Wholemeal bread and flour
- Brown rice
- Wholemeal pasta
- Fresh fruit and vegetables with their skins
- Dried fruit such as figs, prunes, apricots or dates

If you have a very poor appetite or have been asked to follow a low residue diet, increasing the fibre in your diet may not be appropriate. Please speak with your medical team or ask for a referral to the dietitian.

If this doesn't help, or the constipation lasts more than three or four days and you are experiencing abdominal pain then tell your doctor.

#### 2. Drink plenty of fluids

Make sure you drink plenty of fluids. You should aim to drink at least 8 - 10 glasses each day. Avoid alcoholic fluids.

#### 3. Try some natural remedies

You may want to try taking natural remedies such as syrup of figs and prune juice which may help.

#### 4. Try some exercise

It is important to do some gentle exercise such as walking each day.

If you cannot walk by yourself then ask a friend, carer or relative to come with you.

#### 5. Helpful information if you have constipation

Information is available from Macmillan Cancer Support in the following:

- Coping with bowel problems (Fact sheet)
- Controlling the symptoms of cancer (booklet)
- Diet and cancer (booklet)

These are available from the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre or from Macmillan Cancer Support at [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

If you have tried these lifestyle changes and tips, and you are still experiencing constipation, please tell your doctor. They may prescribe you laxatives.

If you would like further advice please contact the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre Dietitian, Tel: 01923 844366.