

Managing constipation

This information is a guide to help you deal with your constipation until you can talk to your doctor. It is not intended to replace medical advice. If your symptoms persist you **must** inform your doctor. 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 you **must** talk to your doctor or dietitian about your symptoms.

Managing your diet

It is important for everybody to eat fibre in their diet. 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.

High fibre foods include:

- wholegrain breakfast cereals and muesli
- wholemeal bread and flour
- brown rice
- onions
- beans and lentils
- wholemeal pasta
- nuts
- fresh fruit and vegetables with their skins (except bananas)
- fruit juices with pulp
- dried fruit such as figs, prunes, apricots or dates

If this does not help, or the constipation lasts more than three or four days and/or you are experiencing abdominal pain you must 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 drinks.

3. Try some natural remedies

You may want to try taking natural remedies such as syrup of figs and prune juice which may help. Or try adding a tablespoon of ground flaxseed or linseed to your breakfast each day.

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 booklets:

- Eating problems and cancer
- Managing the symptoms of cancer

These are available from the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre or from Macmillan Cancer Support at 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: 020 3826 2129.

(Please see overleaf)

Please see the links below, as this information may also be helpful:-

www.bladderandbowel.org/help-information/resources/toilet-positions/

www.bladderandbowel.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/BABC002_Bristol-Stool-Chart-Jan-2016.pdf

24 hour Acute Oncology Service
Mount Vernon Cancer Centre: 07825 028855