

# Preventing and Managing Constipation

## Why do I get constipated?

**Weight management medications and bariatric surgery** can slow down how quickly food is digested and absorbed. The longer stool stays in your colon, the drier and harder it becomes harder to pass.

**Dehydration:** Drinking enough fluids when you feel full quickly can be difficult. Fluids help keep bowels moving. Staying hydrated is your top priority. Aim for 64 fluid ounces daily, or more, to keep your urine color light yellow throughout the day.

**Diet changes:** A high protein diet is recommended to keep muscle tissue strong while you are losing weight. Because you feel fuller more quickly, you may not be eating many fiber-containing foods. The high protein, low fiber diet may increase constipation.

**You may be less active:** Moving your body, even in small bursts, helps regulate bowels.

**You are taking vitamins:** Vitamin supplementation like calcium and iron are often recommended during weight loss treatments, but some people find they may be constipating. Do not stop taking vitamins but do discuss alternative options with our dietitians.

## How do I know if I am constipated?

Your “normal” schedule for bowel movements may change with addition of medications or after surgery. You should have soft, easy to pass bowel movement at least every 3 days. Signs of constipation:

- No bowel movement for 2 or more days.
- Hard stools, painful stools, or stool that is difficult to pass.
- Abdominal bloating and/or pain.
- Nausea, disinterest in eating or drinking.

**How do I manage constipation?** Practice helpful diet and lifestyle habits, use medications as needed.

*See page 2 for more details.*

Hydrate and Move	Fiber foods and supplements	Medications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aim for 64 fluid ounces or more, daily.</li> <li>• Try warm liquids (broth, tea)</li> <li>• Move: try 5-10 min bursts of activity, 2-3x daily</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase fiber rich foods.</li> <li>• Try fiber powders added to your fluids.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can take a stool softener 1-2 times daily if needed.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can take MiraLax every day if needed.</li> </ul>

# Managing Constipation: *Fluids, Fitness, Fiber!*

If you had weight loss surgery, choose decaf coffee or tea until caffeine is allowed.

## Fluids – at least 64 fl oz per day = 4 water bottles



- Warm fluids (coffee, teas, broth) may help stimulate bowels.
- 4 fl oz prune juice (dilute with 4-6 fl oz water if you had weight loss surgery)
- Sip often and consider setting a timer every 9 minutes to remind you to take a drink

## Fitness – move as much as possible.



- Start slowly, even 5 minutes of walking 2-3 times daily can help.
- Increase as able, approved by doctor.

## Fiber – increase as much as you can. If you had surgery, choose options from your diet stage.

- Fruit: apples, peaches, pears, nectarines, cherries, berries, oranges, dried plums or prunes and papaya
- Non-Starchy Vegetables: leafy greens, (spinach, kale, collards), broccoli, Brussel sprouts, cabbage, carrots, green beans, artichoke, cauliflower, tomato
- Starchy vegetables: all types of beans/lentils, corn, sweet potato/yam, peas, winter squash (butternut, pumpkin), taro, yucca, plantain
- Whole grains: oatmeal, whole wheat (bran & germ), bulghur, barley, quinoa, brown/wild rice, nuts and seeds

## Can I take fiber supplements or medications? Speak to your Physician Assistant about these options:

<p>Least aggressive</p> <p>Most aggressive</p>	<p><b>Fiber Supplements</b></p> <p>Benefiber*, Metamucil, Citrucel or generic fiber powders</p> <p><i>*avoid if gluten sensitive</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink at least 64 oz fluids daily.</li> <li>• Mix with water or sugar-free liquids and add gradually. Start with ½ dose, increasing every 3 days.</li> <li>• Look for sugar free options.</li> <li>• Fiber gummies or pills usually have less fiber, may contain sugar or have other ingredients that may cause gas or bloating.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Stool Softeners</b></p> <p>Colace</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take 1-2 per day until regular bowel movements occur. Then, cut back by half dose daily or every other day.</li> <li>• May be less effective than other options</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Natural Laxatives</b></p> <p>Miralax</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mix with water or sugar-free liquids.</li> <li>• Use up to 3 times daily. Reduce frequency as bowel movements become soft and easy to pass.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Stimulant Laxatives</b></p> <p>Dulcolax (pill), Senna leaf “Smooth Move” tea, Dulcolax (suppository)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk with Physician Assistant before taking (patient gateway message or 617-732-8882)</li> </ul>