

Constipation

Proper elimination is essential to good health. Constipation is defined as having fewer bowel movements than is optimal or having bowel movements that are difficult to pass. Frequency of elimination can vary from person to person, however most people feel best with at least one well-formed bowel movement per day. The following are ideas to help you regain bowel regularity.

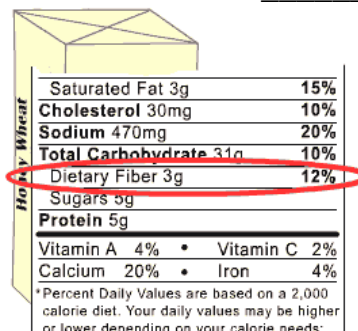
Some things you can do to relieve constipation:

- **Consume more dietary fiber.** Most adults and children only consume about half the amount of fiber recommended. Both soluble and insoluble fiber are important to regulate bowel movements. Most plant-based foods contain both types of fiber. Soluble fiber dissolves in water and forms a gel-like material which can help soothe the digestive tract. Soluble fiber is found in oats, fruits, legumes (beans), chia seeds, slippery elm, marshmallow root, psyllium husks, flax seeds and aloe. Insoluble fiber increases stool bulk promoting movement through the digestive system. Insoluble fiber is found in whole grains, wheat bran, and vegetables.
- **Drink plenty of water & other fluids.** Water helps move food through the intestines. Besides water, fruit and vegetable juices, soups and tea are good sources of fluid.
- **Increase physical activity.** Walking, yoga, swimming and dancing are some exercises that can help food move through the digestive tract.
- **Take the time to have a bowel movement.** Ignoring the urge for a bowel movement can contribute to constipation.

US RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowance) for Fiber Intake

	Age	Grams/day		Age	Grams/day
Males	9-13 yrs	31	Females	9-13 yrs	26
	14-18 yrs	38		14-18 yrs	26
	19-30 yrs	38		19-30 yrs	25
	31-50 yrs	38		31-50 yrs	25
	51-70 yrs	30		51-70 yrs	21
	> 70 yrs	30		> 70 yrs	21
Children	1-3 yrs	19	Pregnant		28
	4-8 yrs	25	Lactating		29

Your Dietary Fiber Recommendation is _____ grams per day.



Saturated Fat	3g	15%	
Cholesterol	30mg	10%	
Sodium	470mg	20%	
Total Carbohydrate	31g	10%	
Dietary Fiber	3g	12%	
Sugars	0g		
Protein	5g		
Vitamin A	4%	Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%	Iron	4%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Ways to increase fiber in your diet:

- **Eat more fruits and vegetables.** All fruits and vegetables contain fiber. Some fruits that are especially high in fiber are prunes, figs, raspberries, pears (with skin), apples (with skin), bananas, oranges and strawberries.
Examples of vegetables that are especially high in fiber are artichokes, peas, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, potatoes, corn and carrots.
- **Choose whole grains.** Whole grains such as wheat spaghetti, barley, bran flakes, oat bran muffin, oatmeal, popcorn and brown rice are good sources of fiber. Refined (processed) grains such as white rice and white bread contain little fiber.
- **Consume beans, nuts & seeds:** Most beans, nuts and seeds are good sources of fiber. Split peas, lentils, black beans, lima beans, baked beans, chia seeds, flaxseed sunflower seeds, almonds, pistachios and pecans are especially high in fiber.

Additional suggestions for constipation:

- An imbalance of intestinal bacteria can sometimes cause constipation. Fermented foods such as yogurt, sauerkraut, miso and tempeh contain helpful bacteria that are good for digestion. Probiotic supplements may also be helpful.
- Warm fluids like tea or coffee can help initiate a bowel movement.
- Eating more slowly and chewing food thoroughly can help improve digestion.
- Resting your feet on something elevated, such as a stool, while sitting on the toilet may be helpful. This brings your knees higher than your hips in a position that may help make elimination faster, more complete and help reduce straining. For more information, visit the squatty potty website (<http://www.squattypotty.com>).

A note on laxative use:

Long-term use of laxatives, even herbal stimulants can reduce your body's natural ability to eliminate and may require you to "retrain" your bowels. Try to avoid these products unless under the guidance of a healthcare professional.

Sources:

1. *Eating, Diet, & Nutrition for Constipation.* (2022, July 21). National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases/constipation/eating-diet-nutrition>
2. Raymond, JL, & Morrow K. (2020). *Krause and Mahan's Food & the Nutrition Care Process* (15th ed.). Saunders.
3. *Get Things Moving — A Dietitian's Guide to Relieving Constipation - Today's Dietitian Magazine.* (2016) <https://www.todaysdietitian.com/newarchives/0716p10.shtml>