

Fibre & fluid for healthy bowels

Fibre helps to prevent constipation and keeps your bowels regular and healthy. Fibre comes from plant foods such as fruit, vegetables, breads, cereals, nuts and seeds.

Tips to prevent and help with constipation

Start a bowel routine

- Use the toilet when you feel the urge to move your bowels. If you delay, you may need to strain later.
- The best time to go to the toilet is within two hours of waking and after breakfast.

Eat regular meals and snacks

- Eat three meals around the same time each day. Have high-fibre snacks between meals.
- Breakfast is particularly important because it gets your bowels moving.

Be physically active

Aim to be physically active most days for at least 30 minutes. Choose activities that you enjoy, like walking, dancing, swimming, golf, tennis and tai chi. Gardening and active work around the house also count as physical activity if they get you out of breath or sweaty.

Every day have at least six servings of bread and cereals

Choose wholegrain and wholemeal for more fibre.

Example of one serving:

- 1 slice of bread
- ½ to 1 cup of breakfast cereal
- 1 cup of cooked rice
- 1 cup of cooked pasta.

Every day have at least five servings of vegetables and fruit

Example of one serving:

- 1 or 2 small, fresh fruit
- ½ cup of canned or stewed fruit
- ½ cup of cooked vegetables
- ½ cup of salad or a salad sandwich.





Drink at least eight cups of fluid daily

- Have some water each day. Milk, fruit juice, hot drinks, soup, jelly, custard, and ice blocks also count as fluids.
- Check your urine to see if you are drinking enough. Your urine should be clear or a pale lemon colour.
- See Are you drinking enough?

Tips to get more fibre

- Start the day with a high-fibre breakfast cereal. Try Weet-Bix, bran-based cereals or porridge. Add fresh or stewed fruit to your cereal.
- Choose wholemeal, or wholegrain breads.
- Have wholegrain crackers or wholemeal bread instead of biscuits.
- Check food labels for fibre content. Read the nutrition information panel on food packets and choose foods with at least 5 g of fibre per 100 g of food.
- Use wholemeal flour and rolled oats in baking and cooking.
- Add extra vegetables to soups and stews.
- Add lentils or split peas to soups and casseroles.
- Add raw or roasted nuts and seeds to salads and stir-fries to add some crunch.
- Try baked beans or a salad made from canned mixed beans.
- Leave skins on fruits and vegetables. Wash them well first.
- Try brown rice and wholemeal pasta.
- Choose high-fibre snacks such as a small handful (30 g) of raw or roasted nuts without added fat, hummus on wholegrain crackers or fresh fruit. Kiwifruit are particularly helpful for constipation.



Some final points

- Increase your fibre gradually. Give your bowel time to adjust to change.
- Cooking does not destroy fibre. High-fibre foods don't have to be raw, rough or crunchy. They can be soft and smooth like fine wholemeal bread, porridge, cereal softened with milk, soft fruit, and cooked vegetables.
- If you need more fibre to help your bowels move, ask your general practice team for advice on a fibre supplement.

Written by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Last reviewed October 2018.

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