

# Treating Constipation

**Constipation** is a common and often uncomfortable problem. You have constipation if you have bowel movements less often than usual or strain to pass hard, dry stool. Constipation can be a temporary problem that lasts a short time. Or it can be a chronic problem that never seems to go away. Fortunately, it can often be controlled.

## **Eat More Fiber**

One of the best ways to help treat constipation is to eat a high-fiber diet.

Fiber (in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables) adds bulk and absorbs water to soften the stool. This helps the stool pass through the colon more easily.

Drinking more water can also help soften stool.

## **Get Regular Exercise**

Regular exercise helps improve the working of your colon and helps ease constipation.

Ask your health care provider about starting a regular exercise program.

## **Avoid Chronic Laxative Use**

Laxatives stimulate the colon to work more rapidly. Continuous use of laxatives can cause the colon to stretch and weaken, and eventually the colon may not work right without them.

Your doctor can help you overcome a dependence on laxatives.

Never use laxatives without consulting your health care provider first.

## **High-Fiber Hints**

Eating more of the following foods can add fiber to your diet and help prevent constipation:

High-fiber cereals

Whole grains, bran, and brown rice

Vegetables such as carrots, broccoli, and greens

Fresh fruits (especially apples, pears, and dried fruits like raisins and apricots)

Nuts and legumes (especially beans such as lentils, kidney beans, and lima beans)

**Note:** If necessary, your doctor may recommend an over-the-counter fiber supplement.