

What is cancer-related constipation?

Constipation means that you are having bowel movements (going poo) less often than normal and the stool (poo) is often dry and hard to pass. Constipation is common for people with cancer.

You may be constipated if:

- You have to push hard and strain to get anything to come out
- You feel the need to have a bowel movement but nothing will come out
- The stool is small, hard, dry, and looks like pellets
- You have stomach ache or cramps

What can I do to manage my constipation?

1. Use laxatives to manage constipation

Laxatives are medicines that help you have a bowel movement. There are many different kinds. Some you buy over-the-counter and some your doctor prescribes.

Be safe when taking laxatives:

- Do not take fibre supplements, like Metamucil, unless your health care team told you to
- You may get mild stomach cramps when you take laxatives. If the cramping is very painful, or if you get diarrhea, stop taking the medication and speak to your doctor

2. Drink more liquids

Liquids add water to your stool, making it softer and easier to pass.

These tips can help you drink more liquids:

- Drink at least 6-8 cups of liquids each day. Water is best but any liquid will help
- Hot drinks can help you have a bowel movement
- If drinking liquids is hard, take small sips often or eat watery fruit

3. Be active

Exercise can help to keep you regular. Even a little bit of activity may help.

Tips on being active:

- If you are not active, start with light exercise like walking, gentle yoga or stretching
- Walk to the end of your driveway, up and down your hallway or use a stationary bike
- Go at your own pace and slowly raise the amount and difficulty of exercise

4. Eat more fibre

If you have mild constipation, eating more fibre may help. High fibre foods help make your stool softer and easier to pass.

Be safe when eating more fibre:

- If you eat a lot of fibre from grains, make sure you also drink a lot of liquids. If you do not drink enough your constipation may get worse
- If you take opioid pain medication, ask your health care team if eating more fibre is right for you
- If you have been told that you could get a bowel obstruction (a blockage that stops stool [poo] from coming out), check with your health care team before adding fibre to your diet

High Fibre Foods	
Fruits	Natural laxatives like prunes, prune juice, papaya and rhubarb Fresh fruit like avocados, berries, apples, pears, bananas, mangos, plums and figs Eat the skin on fruits like apples and pears because the skin has the most fibre
Veggies	Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, beets, cabbage, corn, peas, artichokes and carrots Leafy greens like spinach, kale, Swiss chard and collard greens Add greens to a smoothie to up the fibre
Grains	Barley, oat bran, brown rice, wild rice, quinoa, cornmeal and bulgur wheat Whole grain crackers, pasta, pancakes, waffles and bagels Try adding wheat bran to foods like soups, mashed potatoes and casseroles
Protein	Kidney beans, navy beans, chickpeas, lentils, peas and black beans Nuts, like almonds, pistachios, pecans, sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds Try adding beans to soups and salads

5. Make a bathroom routine

These tips can help you make a bathroom routine:

- Make sure you are alone and comfortable when using the bathroom
- Try to go to the bathroom around the same time each day
- Try to have a bowel movement first thing in the morning or after a meal
- If you can, get up out of bed to use the bathroom or commode, instead of a bedpan
- Put a low footstool under your feet when sitting on the toilet. This puts you in a better position
- Do not push hard or strain when trying to pass stool. Take your time and try to relax