

First Line Dietary Advice For Constipation

Information for patients

What is constipation?

Constipation is a common digestive condition. It can mean that you are not passing stools regularly, or you are unable to completely empty your bowel. Constipation can also occur when you are finding it difficult to pass a stool, because the stools are hard and dry. This can cause you to strain.

Constipation can lead to other symptoms including: abdominal bloating or discomfort, stomach pains or cramps, excess wind and lethargy.

What are the causes of constipation?

There are many causes of constipation however the two dietary factors most associated with this condition are:

- Not having enough fibre in the diet
- Not having enough fluid

Therefore, dietary changes which focus on increasing fibre and fluid intake can be beneficial in the management of constipation.

Dietary Advice for the Management of Constipation

- **Gradually increase your intake of fibre**

Fibre is the edible parts of plants which pass through your bowels undigested, therefore it provides the bulk to your stools.

Try to gradually increase your intake of high fibre foods (it is important to do this gradually as a sudden increase can make symptoms worse).

Rich sources of fibre include:

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Bean and pulses
- Oat based products
- Wholegrain cereals

- **Gradually increase your intake of fluid – aiming for at least **2 litres** (**8 glasses**) of fluid a day**

Drinks can include water, milk, squash, herbal teas and other **non**-caffeinated drinks.

- **Linseeds**

Try gradually introducing brown or golden linseeds (whole or ground) into your diet. Start with ½ teaspoon a day and gradually build up to 1 tablespoon a day. These linseeds can be purchased in supermarkets and health food shops. They can be sprinkled on cereals, yogurts, soups, stews or salads

It is vital that you increase your fluid intake if you are using this approach. The fibre provides your stool with extra bulk, but to make this stool easy to pass, you need to ensure it is soft and slippery; this can be achieved by drinking enough fluid. Therefore, ensure that you have a 200ml glass of fluid with each spoonful of linseeds taken.

Other advice for the Management of Constipation

Identify a bowel routine – find a time of day and a place where you are comfortable to spend time on the toilet in the correct positioning.



- Respond to your bowel's natural pattern – when you feel the urge to go, respond to this by trying to open your bowel. Delaying can make the constipation worse.
- Keep active as physical activity helps the bowels to function.

Laxatives: Discuss the use of laxatives with your GP. If you suffer with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) then do NOT use *lactulose* as this can make IBS symptoms significantly worse due to its ability to ferment in the gut.