

What can I do about constipation?

What are signs of constipation?

- Fewer bowel movements (BMs) than usual *for you*. If you normally have a BM once per day, constipation might be defined as having a BM every third day. Constipation is a consistent change, not a one-time occurrence.
- If you are constipated, you might also feel like:
 - ◆ Your BMs are too hard or too dry.
 - ◆ Your BMs are hard to start or to get out/pass.
 - ◆ You have a lot of gas or bloating.
 - ◆ You have stomach cramps.

Tell your doctor or nurse if you haven't had a BM in more than three days, or if you feel constipated.

Things that may help with constipation:

- Try to have a bowel movement at the same time every day; colon reflexes are usually strongest 10-15 minutes after eating breakfast. When you feel the urge to go, don't wait.
- Exercise, such as going for a walk, can help.
- Take time to relax and enjoy your meals on a routine schedule.
- Drink fluids (8-10 cups of fluid per day) and eat foods containing water to help keep your stool soft. Drinking warm fluids may help more.
- Eat foods that are high in fiber (unless they bother you), such as:
 - ◆ Bran, oatmeal, whole grain cereals, and breads
 - ◆ Dried fruits (e.g., apricots, figs, prunes, raisins)
 - ◆ Raw, unpeeled fruits and vegetables, and salads
 - ◆ Nuts, popcorn, and coconut

Things to avoid that *might* make constipation worse:

- Drinks with caffeine or alcohol, such as soda, coffee, beer, wine, and liquor (limit of 1-2 per day)
- Milk or milk products, such as ice cream, milkshakes, and cheese
- Greasy and fried foods, such as French fries and hamburgers

If you are constipated, we recommend the following bowel regimen:

Step 1: Take two senna tablets at bedtime.

- *If you have a BM the next day, continue taking two senna tablets at bedtime.*
- *If you do not have a BM the next day, move to Step 2.*

