



Constipation After Your Operation

A guide to help you with constipation after surgery

Constipation is when your bowels move less often and your stools are more firm. After an operation you can have constipation. This can cause discomfort until you get back to your regular schedule.

Causes of Constipation After Surgery:

- a change in your regular eating habits
- narcotic pain medicines slow down the process for your body to digest food
- a decrease in your daily activity also slows down food digestion

Tips to Decrease Constipation:

- **Take the stool softener** medicine that was prescribed (Colace or Docusate).
- **Increase the amount of liquids** that you drink to keep your stools soft. Drink 6 – 8 glasses of water per day in addition to other liquids you would drink with your meals.
 - Signs that you are not drinking enough are:
 - the amount that you urinate is less than normal
 - your urine is dark colored
 - feeling dizzy when you stand up
- **Eat a diet high in fiber.** The best source of fiber is breakfast cereal with a fiber content of 5 grams or greater. Fiber content is listed with the nutrition information often found on the side of the cereal box, such as Spoon-size Shredded Wheat, All-Bran, and Oat Bran

Other foods high in fiber include, Dry and unsalted peanuts whole wheat bread, parsnips, white or red grapefruit, cantaloupe, cooked carrots, prunes, frozen peas, baked beans, kidney beans and split peas.



Questions?

Contact: **Surgical
Specialties Nurse
Advice Line:
(206) 598-4549**

Monday-Friday

8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

Your questions are important. Call if you have questions or concerns.

Tips to Decrease Constipation:

- **Try to have meals at the same time each day.** It helps to eat breakfast at the same time every day. This helps get your bowels back on a regular schedule.
- **If you are allowed to drink coffee have some at breakfast.** Decaf coffee will work too. Coffee will stimulate your bowels.
- **Drink prune juice** or warm prune juice at breakfast.
- **Exercise/walking after breakfast** will increase the movement of food through your intestines.
- **Most people feel the urge to have a bowel movement about 20 minutes after a meal.** If you feel the urge, try and go.
- **Do not just sit on the toilet and read a book.** Sitting on the toilet for a long time can cause painful swelling or hemorrhoids. Wait until you feel the urge to have a bowel movement, and then go and sit on the toilet.

Laxatives:

Sometimes after an operation a laxative is needed to help get things started. The over-the-counter medicines listed below can be bought without a prescription at any drug store.

- ***Milk of Magnesia liquid:*** works overnight.
- ***Biscodyl rectal suppositories:*** works in about 20 minutes.
- ***Fleets enema:*** works in about 15 minutes.

Call the Nurse Advice Line or Your Doctor If:

- It has been three days since your surgery and these tips have not helped you to have a bowel movement.
- You are sick to your stomach and throwing up.
- You feel dizzy or lightheaded when you stand up.



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
MEDICAL CENTER

Surgical Specialties Center

Box 356165

1959 NE Pacific St., Seattle, WA 98195

(206) 598-4477