

The Continence and Support Center

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CHRONIC CONSTIPATION

Chronic constipation can contribute to incontinence, bladder urgency and frequency, problems with bladder emptying, and increased risk for urinary tract infection. Constipation is defined as the difficult, sometimes painful, passage of hard, dry stools. You can most effectively correct constipation with a diet that is high in fiber and fluids with adequate exercise.

There are many medical causes of constipation. Further evaluations may uncover other treatable problems that need medical attention. Many medications cause constipation, including pain medications, antacids, iron supplements, and antidepressants. A review of medication may identify drugs that may be contributing to the problem and appropriate substitutions should be considered by a clinician. For many people, however, simple dietary changes can be very effective.

Adding dietary fiber in the form of unprocessed wheat bran is usually very effective in improving bowel action. Adding bran in gradual amounts allows the body to adjust to fiber. If you are not accustomed to fiber, you may bloat or cramp at first. These symptoms are temporary and go away in a week or two. The key is to start with small amounts and increase by small amounts on a weekly basis.

Fiber, such as unprocessed wheat bran, can be added to other foods such as puddings, yogurt, and baked goods. High fiber cereals can also be taken on a daily basis and can even be use to make high-fiber muffins.

Read labels to determine the actual fiber content. Many cereals do not have much fiber at all. Some of the more fiber- packed brands of cereal include...

- Fiber One
- All-Bran
- 100% Bran
- Fiber-All
- Bran Buds

A concentrated fiber formula that can be a high-fiber supplement is Special Recipe. This fiber- charged recipe consists of...

- 1-cup applesauce
- 1-cup unprocessed wheat bran or Miller's Bran
- 3/4-cup prune juice

Mix all ingredients together and refrigerate. Take 1 tablespoon a day for one week. Then increase your intake by 1 tablespoon a day every week thereafter. Do this until you begin to produce soft stools, and then maintain that dosage from that point on. The bran helps keep moisture in the stool so it remains soft. Be sure to drink more liquids while you are taking this supplement.

Some people like to mix just the applesauce and the bran together. If you modify the recipe in this way, be sure to drink 1/2 to 1 glass of prune juice instead of mixing it in the recipe. You can also add mashed banana or dried fruits such as raisins or figs to increase fiber content.

Physical activity also helps stimulate bowel action. Daily walking or simple exercises in a chair can have a positive effect on sluggish bowels.