

# Lower Your Risk of a Bowel Obstruction

## What is a bowel obstruction?

A bowel obstruction is when your intestine (gut) becomes fully or partially blocked. An obstruction can happen anywhere in your gut, like the small intestine, large intestine (colon), or rectum. This may be from:

- gut narrowing related to:
  - cancer treatment, like radiation therapy
  - hernia
  - scar tissue, like from past surgery or inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)
  - swelling
  - tumour
- pressure from fluid in the abdomen (belly)
- issues with some muscles in the gut
- issues with blood flow in the gut

## Symptoms

When food can't pass through your gut, it may cause symptoms like:

- acid reflux or heartburn
- bloating or distention (swelling of abdomen)
- constipation or diarrhea
- low appetite (don't feel like eating)
- nausea or vomiting
- stomach pain or cramps



A partial or complete obstruction can be dangerous.

**If you think you have an obstruction,** contact your healthcare team right away or go to the emergency department.

## Tips to lower your risk

These tips may lower your risk of a bowel obstruction. They may not stop it from happening.

- Chew your foods well. Try to chew each bite until it is a smooth texture.
  - Cut foods into small pieces. This can help with chewing.
- Eat in a relaxed setting and eat slowly.
- Eat small meals and snacks throughout the day.
- Eat foods that are:
  - soft or easily mashed with a fork
  - cooked
  - peeled
  - seedless or have the seeds removed
  - blended or pureed, like smooth nut butters, hummus, or soups
- Limit or avoid rough, stringy, or fibrous foods. See page 2 for examples.
  - If you want to eat these foods, cook, peel, or blend them to make them easier to digest and less likely to cause a blockage.
    - For example, blend leafy vegetables, like spinach or kale, into soups, sauces, or smoothies.
- Drink enough fluids daily. This will help with digestion and may help keep your poop soft.
  - Fluids include water, milk, fortified soy beverage, smoothies, soup, and broth.
  - Limit or avoid alcohol.

## Talk to your healthcare team

If you continue to have symptoms, like pain or nausea after eating, you may need a pureed or liquid diet.

- Visit [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts) to learn about balanced fluids and a pureed diet.

Ask if a daily multivitamin and mineral supplement is right for you. Some people may do better with chewable tablets.

|                                   | Foods to choose more often  | Foods to limit  |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Protein foods</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All milk and fortified soy beverage</li> <li>• Eggs</li> <li>• Plain or flavoured yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese, cream soups, and puddings</li> <li>• Smooth nut or seed butters</li> <li>• Soy foods, like tofu and tempeh</li> <li>• Tender and moist meat, poultry, fish, and wild game.</li> <li>• Well-cooked or pureed beans, peas, and lentils (can mash easily with a fork), such as hummus</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jerky and other dried meats</li> <li>• Milk or dairy products with nuts or seeds added</li> <li>• Nuts and seeds</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Grain foods</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole grain (no intact grains), white, or rye breads, cereals, crackers, muffins, pancakes, pasta, and waffles</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole grain breads, cereals, or muffins with intact grains, nuts, seeds, coconut, dried fruit, or granola</li> <li>• Wild rice</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Vegetables and fruits</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% fruit or vegetable juices</li> <li>• All canned, fresh, and frozen fruits with skins, peels, membranes, and seeds removed</li> <li>• Pureed or blended leafy vegetables, like spinach or kale, in soups, sauces, or smoothies.</li> </ul> <div style="border: 1px solid #00a0c0; padding: 10px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Many of the vegetables and fruits listed in "Foods to limit" can be eaten if they are cooked well, pureed, or blended, with peels or skins and seeds removed.</p> </div> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All raw vegetables</li> <li>• Dried fruits, like raisins, dates, and figs</li> <li>• Fruits with small seeds like berries, kiwi fruit, and pomegranate</li> <li>• Fruits with tough peels like apples and grapes</li> <li>• Leafy vegetables, like lettuce and cabbage</li> <li>• Membranes of oranges, mandarins, and grapefruits</li> <li>• Mushrooms</li> <li>• Persimmons</li> <li>• Stringy fruits like pineapple and rhubarb</li> <li>• Stringy vegetables, like asparagus, bamboo shoots, bean sprouts, celery, and spaghetti squash</li> <li>• Vegetables with tough skins or outer coatings like onions, corn, peppers, and pea pods</li> </ul> |
| <b>Condiments and other foods</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carbonated, sparkling, or fizzy drinks like pop (may cause bloating)</li> <li>• Herbs and spices</li> <li>• Ketchup, mustard, and vinegar</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coconut</li> <li>• Popcorn</li> </ul>  |

## For more information



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on [ahs.ca/811](#).
- Visit [ahs.ca/Nutrition](#).

