

Tips to Reduce Constipation on Your Kidney Diet

Constipation is a common problem for people with kidney disease. Constipation can be caused by:

- a diet low in fibre
- not getting enough activity
- limiting fluid
- some medicines
- stress or depression
- ignoring the urge to have a bowel movement

How do I prevent constipation?

Eat enough fibre every day.

Fibre keeps your digestive system healthy and prevents constipation by making stools bulky and soft.

- After you start a higher fibre diet it may take a few days to notice a difference in your bowel movements.
- Increase the fibre in your diet slowly. Too much fibre too quickly may cause constipation.
- Spread your fibre intake throughout the day. Don't have it all at one meal. Drink as much fluid as you are allowed.
- You may have more gas at first. This should go away as your body gets used to the change in diet. Increase fibre slowly.
- If you have increased fibre in your diet, but still have constipation, talk to your doctor.

Tips to increase fibre

When potassium and phosphorus levels are well managed:

Vegetables and fruits:

- Eat 5–6 servings of low potassium vegetables and fruit a day. Ask your dietitian if you can eat more vegetables and fruit than this.

One serving of vegetables and fruit is ½ cup (125 mL) or 1 medium vegetable or fruit.

- Eat skins or peels of vegetables and fruit (except potatoes) as they are high in fibre. Wash before eating.
- **Fruits with the most fibre** are pears, apples, raspberries, blueberries, peaches, strawberries, cherries, and grapes.
- Prunes can be eaten in small amounts as they are higher in potassium. Have no more than 3 dried or canned prunes a day, or no more than ¼ cup (60 mL) prune juice a day.
- **Vegetables with the most fibre** are green peas, turnips, corn, carrots, cabbage, green or yellow beans, broccoli, and cauliflower.

Bran, seeds, and other grain foods:

- Add 1–3 Tbsp (15–45 mL) of bran cereal to another favourite cereal. Talk to your dietitian before eating more than 3 Tbsp (45 mL) per day.
- Add 1–2 Tbsp (15–30 mL) of ground flax seeds or chia seeds to yogurt or hot cereal. Don't have more than 2 Tbsp (30 mL) a day.
- Add wheat bran to cereal, soups, casseroles, hamburger, gravy, pudding, or other foods. Start with 1 tsp (5 mL) per serving and increase by 1 tsp (5 mL) each day, up to 2 Tbsp (30 mL) bran a day.
- Other sources of fibre are whole wheat bread, corn bran cereal, oatmeal, barley, and unsalted popcorn.

When potassium or phosphorus levels are high:

When your potassium or phosphorus levels are high, your dietitian may talk to you about using fibre supplements. These add fibre to your diet but don't raise the phosphorus or potassium in your blood.

See the *Fibre supplements* section on the next page.

Fibre supplements

One kind of fibre supplement recommended for people with kidney disease is **inulin** powder. Inulin powder is tasteless. You can mix it with food or liquids such as applesauce, hamburger meat, or soup.

You can buy inulin fibre supplement powders in grocery stores and drug stores. Follow the directions on the package. Avoid brands with added calcium, vitamin D, or other vitamins or minerals.

Fibre supplements to try:

Other tips

- Eat regular meals and snacks through the day. This keeps food moving through your bowel.
- Make sure you drink as much fluid as you are allowed. Ask your doctor or dietitian whether it's safe for you to have more fluids.
- Try to train your bowels by using the bathroom at about the same time each day. Don't ignore the urge to have a bowel movement.
- Increase your physical activity.
- If you want more tips to reduce constipation, talk to your healthcare team.

Meal ideas to reduce constipation

The ideas in the *Sample meal ideas* column below show how you can use some of the higher fibre choices in this handout. These are examples only—the best meals and fluid amounts for you may be different from these. There is space to write your own meal ideas.

Sample meal ideas	My meal ideas
Breakfast	
1 cup (250 mL) oatmeal and 1 Tbsp (15 mL) ground flax seed with ½ cup (125 mL) 1% milk 1 slice whole wheat toast, 1 Tbsp (15 mL) peanut butter ½ cup (125 mL) grapes ½ cup (125 mL) coffee, 1 tsp (5 mL) sugar	
Lunch	
½ cup (125 mL) 2% cottage cheese, unsalted 1 homemade bran muffin, 1 tsp (5 mL) margarine ½ cup (125 mL) each fresh peaches and strawberries ½ cup (125 mL) carrot sticks 1 cup (250 mL) water	
Supper	
2½ oz (75 g) meat loaf with added wheat bran 2 Tbsp (30 mL) unsalted gravy ½ cup (125 mL) barley cooked with 2 tsp (10 mL) non-hydrogenated margarine ½ cup (125 mL) green peas, boiled 1 cup (250 mL) water	
Snack Options:	
½ cup (125 mL) corn bran cereal with 3 Tbsp (45 mL) dried cranberries; 3 cups (750 mL) unsalted popcorn; or fruit (pear or apple)	