

Reducing Constipation

Constipation is a common side effect after surgery, injury, or when using narcotic pain medication. There are many reasons why constipation can occur during these times, including being less active and changes in your diet. Symptoms of constipation usually do not last long, but here are some tips to reduce the risk.

Drink plenty of fluids.

Liquids such as water, juice, decaffeinated tea, and soup help prevent dehydration and soften the stool. Prune juice is also a natural laxative that can be started in small (1-2 tsp) doses.

Eat a healthy diet.

Grains, fiber, fruits, and vegetables help the body pass stool. Try to include fruits and vegetables at each meal to reach a total daily fiber intake of 25-35 grams. Foods higher in water and electrolytes, like many fruits and vegetables, aid in reducing constipation.

Keep moving!

Try to get up and move at least every 1-2 hours. After surgery, sitting up in a chair for meals, walking, and standing is recommended. Movement is encouraged after surgery to recover, get stronger, and reduce risk of constipation.

Try an over-the-counter laxative.

Laxatives help you to have a bowel movement. There are four different kinds: bulking agents, stool softeners, osmotic laxatives, and stimulant laxatives. All of these work best when taken with a glass of water and increased fluid intake throughout the day. Examples of over-the-counter laxatives are:

- **Colace®** softens the stool but does not stimulate the bowel to produce a stool. It is a capsule that can be taken by mouth twice daily. The product usually begins working in 12-72 hours.
- **Senokot®** (Senna) softens the stool and stimulates the bowel to move. It is taken by mouth and you can take up to two tablets twice a day. This product is a good choice if simply taking a stool softener like Colace is not enough. Results are usually noticed within 6-12 hours after starting a dose.
- **MiraLAX®** is both a stool softener and a laxative. It works by drawing water into the bowel without significant harsh effects. Dissolve one packet in 8 ounces of water or other liquid and drink daily. Results are usually noticed in 1-3 days after starting.
- **Magnesium citrate** is a laxative drink that draws water into the bowel and stimulates movement quickly. Follow directions on the bottle and drink plenty of water. This product is a good choice if Colace, Senna, or Miralax have not given relief. Do not use more than 1 bottle daily.

*Contact your provider if your symptoms do not improve or you have other concerns.