

How to Avoid Being Constipated

About Constipation

Constipation is when it is difficult to have a bowel movement and stool becomes hard and dry.

Why Constipation Happens

The normal function of the large intestine, which is also called the large bowel or colon, is to absorb liquid from the digestive tract.

Even when you don't have a bowel movement, the colon keeps doing its usual job of removing liquid. This makes the stool hard and difficult to pass.



Large intestine, or colon, in the human body

These are reasons the bowel may slow down:

- Taking narcotics or pain medicines
- Using some anti-nausea medicines
- Being dehydrated
- Eating or drinking less than usual
- Having surgery in the abdomen area

How to Keep From Getting Constipated

- Stay hydrated. Drink enough water, juice, sports drinks, soups, or other liquids to keep your urine a light yellow color.
- Avoid drinks that have caffeine or alcohol. They can make you more dehydrated.
- Be as active as you can. Ask your health care provider what is safest for you, or make an appointment with our cancer exercise specialists.
- Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, and fiber. Make an appointment with our dietitians to help figure out what's right for you.

The Linda B. and Robert B. Wiggins Wellness and Integrative Health Center at Huntsman Cancer Institute offers one-on-one fitness and activity plans, nutrition counseling, and more. Call 801-587-4585 or visit www.huntsmancancer.org/wellness.

Be sure to check with your nurse or doctor before taking any medicines for constipation, especially medicines that go in the rectum.

If You Do Get Constipated

Taking a stool softener or laxative and drinking prune juice or warm liquids can help.

- Stool softeners make bowel movements more comfortable. These are not laxatives. The medicine name is docusate sodium. There are many brand names, so check with your nurse or pharmacist to make sure you get what you need.
- Laxatives make the bowel move faster. Senna (sennosides) and/or Miralax® (polyethylene glycol) are commonly recommended.

Take 1 or 2 senna tablets up to 3 times a day

OR

Take ½ to 1 dose of Miralax® (or a generic brand) up to 3 times a day

- Senna-S is a combination of senna laxative and docusate sodium. Some people like the laxative and stool softener in one pill.

Everyone is different. The correct combination of softeners and laxatives is the one that helps you have a comfortable bowel movement every 1 or 2 days.

- Write down what you take.
- Be sure to tell your doctor and nurse what you take.