



# CONSTIPATION

## *after bariatric surgery*

It's normal to have less stool and fewer bowel movements in the first few weeks after bariatric surgery. If you're passing stool only every couple of days, but it's easy to pass, you're not constipated, this might just be your new cycle for a while. However, if your bowel movements are only a few times a week, they're hard, and you need to force more than before surgery to pass them, you may be constipated.

**The information below is divided into 2 sections:**

- **EARLY constipation** - referring to constipation in the first 6 weeks after surgery (or when you're on the full fluid/puree/soft menus).
- **LATE constipation** - referring to constipation after 6 weeks, or once you're on regular texture foods.



### **COMMON CAUSES OF EARLY CONSTIPATION:**

- You're not drinking enough liquids.
- You're eating significantly less food compared to before surgery.
- Your diet is very low in fiber.
- Side effects from some medications and vitamins prescribed after surgery.



### **TIPS TO TREAT EARLY CONSTIPATION:**

*\*\*\*Use these tips to not only treat constipation after surgery, but also to help prevent it!*

- ✓ **Drink at least 6 cups (48 oz) of low calorie liquids daily.**  
Try your best to sip on liquids all day, even if you're not thirsty. Warm fluids are especially encouraged. If you're drinking enough, your urine will run clear by the end of the day and you should be urinating more often.
- ✓ **Add a natural laxative to your diet.**  
Include ¼ cup of pureed stewed plums or ½ cup of prune juice daily.
- ✓ **Add more fiber to your diet.**  
Choose legume soups more often (e.g. chickpea, bean, and lentil pureed soups). Add high fiber grains and seeds (e.g. wheat germ, wheat bran, chia seeds, flax seeds), berries, spinach, and/or high fiber cereals into your smoothies.



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✓ **Try a probiotic.**

Taking a daily probiotic product (e.g. probiotic yogurt, kefir, or a probiotic supplement in pill or liquid form) may help with constipation in some patients. Probiotics are live bacteria that help keep your gut, or intestines, healthy. Ask your doctor, dietitian, or pharmacist for some examples.

✓ **Try a powdered fiber supplement.**

If you're able to drink at least 6 cups (48 oz) of fluids every day, try a powdered fiber supplement in small doses. Ask your doctor, dietitian, or pharmacist for some examples. Start with the lowest suggested dose—no matter how constipated you are—and increase as needed.

✓ **Get moving!**

Walk for 15 minutes after your meals to help get things moving.

✓ **Use a footstool in the washroom.**

Place a footstool under your feet when sitting on the toilet to raise your knees above your hips.

If you haven't found relief despite incorporating all of these tips and it's been a week or longer, ask your doctor to recommend a gentle over the counter laxative for temporary relief.



## COMMON CAUSES OF LATE CONSTIPATION:

*(Or constipation once you're eating regular texture foods.)*

- You're not drinking enough liquids.
- Your diet is very low in fiber (e.g. you aren't having fruits, vegetables, and whole grains daily).
- Side effects from some medications and vitamins prescribed after surgery.
- You haven't started exercising yet.
- You're relying daily on multiple protein supplements (e.g. 1 protein shake + 2 protein bars).



## TIPS TO TREAT LATE CONSTIPATION:

✓ **Drink at least 6 cups (48 oz) of low calorie liquids daily.**

✓ **Add psyllium fiber to your diet.**

Add three tablespoons of psyllium fiber to your day by mixing it into your yogurt, oatmeal, smoothie, cereal, or chili. Psyllium husk or powder is typically found in the baking aisle of



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most grocery stores and at all natural health food stores. Additionally, psyllium fiber is found in bran cereals, other cereals marketed as rich in fiber, and in some powdered fiber supplements. Check the ingredient list for “psyllium” to be sure. For best results, use psyllium fiber daily.

✓ **Add legumes to your recipes.**

Legumes (e.g. chickpeas, lentils, beans, and edamame) are very effective for relieving constipation. Try a vegetarian chili, a thick lentil soup, a chickpea salad, or a simple can of beans in tomato sauce.

✓ **Choose whole grain products.**

Choose bread, crackers, tortillas, or whole wheat pasta that contain at least 3 grams of fiber per suggested serving. Quinoa is naturally a high fiber option.

✓ **Add nuts and seeds to your diet.**

Have a snack of ¼ cup seeds (e.g. pumpkin, sunflower, etc.) or nuts (e.g. almonds, peanuts, soy nuts, etc.), and a fruit. On average, seeds and nuts pack 3 g of fiber per ¼ cup portion.

✓ **Add fruit and vegetables to your diet.**

Include fruit and vegetables at every meal and snack. Every mouthful counts! Try a small handful of blueberries with breakfast, half a pear in your yogurt at snack, five carrots at lunch, ¼ cup of wilted spinach at supper, etc.

✓ **Be aware of protein supplements.**

Relying daily on protein bars and shakes to meet your protein goals can worsen your constipation because these products are often low in fiber. Choose protein bars that have at least 3 to 5 grams of fiber. If you’re having more than 1 protein shake a day, blend in a source of fiber (e.g. berries, spinach, chia seeds, flax seeds, wheat bran, wheat germ, etc.).

✓ **Try a probiotic.**

Taking a daily probiotic product (e.g. probiotic yogurt, kefir, or a probiotic supplement in pill or liquid form) may help with constipation in some patients. Probiotics are live bacteria that help keep your gut, or intestines, healthy. Ask your doctor, dietitian, or pharmacist for some examples.

✓ **Get moving!**

Are you moving your body at least 3 days a week? Exercise doesn’t have to mean the gym. Dance classes, joining a community sports team, hiking, swimming, walking, etc. are all great activities as well.



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## WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION FOR CONSTIPATION

*(For early and late constipation.)*

If you're experiencing any of the following, contact your doctor as soon as possible:

- Your constipation isn't improving despite incorporating most of the tips above and it's been 1 to 2 weeks.
- You've developed hemorrhoids.
- You're experiencing severe pain in passing stools.
- You have abdominal pain and are unable to pass gas.
- You have blood in your stool.
- The color of your stool is abnormal (e.g. black or white).