

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

Diet and cancer care: constipation

This information is part of a series of suggestions to help relieve the symptoms caused by cancer or its treatment and enable you to eat.

Constipation is when your bowel movements become more difficult and less frequent. Constipation can be a common side effect of many medications, cancer treatment or in some cases due to cancer itself if the tumour is in lower abdomen. It may also be the result of not eating enough fibre, having a poor fluid intake, anxiety or being less active. Left untreated it can make you sluggish, bloated, and uncomfortable. You are also less likely to want to eat.

- Please talk to your doctor or nurse as you may need medication or further investigations to find the cause of your constipation and provide the right treatment.
- Drink plenty of fluids, aim for at least 2 litres (8-10 cups) each day unless your doctor has told you otherwise. This can be hot or cold drinks such as tea, coffee, hot chocolate, malt drinks, water, squash, soups and fruit juices. You may need extra fluid in hot weather or when exercising.
- Eat more fibre containing foods. High fibre foods include:
 - Whole grain cereals such as Shredded Wheat[®], Weetabix[®], branflakes, multigrain cereals and porridge oats
 - Rye, wholemeal or granary bread
 - Whole wheat pasta, bulgar wheat and wholemeal flour
 - Brown and red rice varieties
 - Baked and boiled new potatoes with their skins on



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- Fresh, dried or tinned fruit in natural juices
 - All vegetables
 - Pulses like beans, peas and lentils.
- Take your time when eating to chew your food well.
 - Increase the fibre choices in your daily diet gradually, to allow your body to adjust to and prevent build-up of gas.
 - Natural remedies like prunes, prune juice, fig syrup and dried apricots can also be considered. However, you may still need prescription medications (laxatives) depending on the cause of your constipation.
 - If possible, try and take some gentle exercise, such as walking, daily. Ask your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist about suitable exercise for you.
 - Remember to take your medication (laxatives) as advised, or ask your doctor or pharmacist about suitable alternative medication.
 - If despite treatment, you are still constipated and experiencing low appetite and weight loss, then please ask your doctor or nurse to refer you to a Dietitian.

Local dietetic department contact details:

Coventry Dietitians:	024 7696 6161
Nuneaton Dietitians:	024 7686 5098
Redditch and Bromsgrove Dietitians:	01527 512043
Warwick Dietitians:	01926 495321 extension 4258

Further information on diet and cancer is also available from:

Macmillan Cancer Support www.macmillan.org.uk

World Cancer Research Fund www.wcrf-uk.org

National Health Service www.nhs.uk

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This information has been produced by Coventry Macmillan Dietitians, University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire NHS Trust.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 6161 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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