

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO BEAT CONSTIPATION

What is constipation?

- Constipation is one of the most common medical complaints in Australia.
- If you struggle to empty your bowels completely or open your bowels infrequently, you may be constipated.
- Constipation can lead to stomach discomfort, nausea and fatigue.

Neglected gut?

An unhappy gut can be caused by a variety of factors, including...

A lack of dietary fibre.

There are many types of fibre. Insoluble fibre adds bulk to your stool and keeps you regular – without enough insoluble fibre, you may become constipated. Soluble fibre, on the other hand, absorbs water. It also adds bulk to your stool, which helps to keep things moving. New research has linked prebiotic fibre to improving constipation.

Insufficient water intake.

You may be constipated if you don't drink enough water, even if your diet is high in fibre. Fibre draws water into your digestive tract and softens the stool. Without enough water, your stool will be hard and difficult to move along your digestive tract.

Inactivity.

Exercise strengthens the muscles of your digestive system and gets them working, speeding up the transit time of the contents in your bowel.

Stress.

Worrying excessively can upset your gut in several ways. It can cause inflammation and lead to constipation and/or diarrhoea.

Resisting the urge to have a bowel movement.

This can cause constipation as the stool will lose moisture, which makes it harder to pass.

Changes to routine.

A shift in your usual routine – like going on holidays or doing shift work – can lead to constipation.

Five tips to get things moving

1

Choose minimally processed quality carbs.

Wholegrains and legumes are gut-loving superstars. To boost your wholegrain intake, opt for rolled oats, brown rice and wholemeal pasta over their refined white counterparts, like white rice and pasta. To eat more legumes, try baked beans for breakfast, a chickpea salad for lunch or dhal made from lentils for dinner.

Aim for colour and variety of veg.

Fruit and vegetables are particularly rich in fibre, especially the skins – so throw away your veggie peeler! Your target is a rainbow of at least two fruits and five veg a day.

2



3

Move more.

Your target is 30 minutes every single day. The more, the better.



Drink enough water.

As a rule of thumb, that's 30mL of water per kilogram of your body weight each day. If you weigh 80kg, for example, you should aim for 2.4L of water per day. Drinking tea and coffee count towards your water target.

4



Nourish your gut with pre- and probiotics.

Some pre- and probiotics have been linked to reducing constipation. In particular, the prebiotic *Galacto-oligosaccharides (GOS)*, which is found in beans, chickpeas, lentils, cashews and pistachios, (along with GOS-enriched foods like yogurt) has the potential to nourish helpful microbes, like bifidobacteria, that play a key role in digestive health. There are also specific strains of probiotics, such as *B. lactis (BB-12®)*, that can be added to food products, like yogurt, which have the potential to support regularity of bowel movements. Your dietitian can help you identify foods that have the relevant probiotic strains in a dose that is suitable for your condition.

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5

