

## **Tips on how to prevent constipation!**

As a pelvic health specialist, I often get questions about how to prevent constipation symptoms that are aggravating an existing bladder problem. I've listed my top tips below...

### ***Increase your dietary fiber!***

A diet high in fiber will go a long way towards solving your constipation problem. Aim for 25 to 38 grams of fiber per day, if you are unsure of how much fiber is in food check out this fiber resource [here](#).

### ***There are two types of fiber; soluble and insoluble fiber in foods.***

- Soluble fiber dissolves in water. When this type of fiber is going through your gut, it absorbs water and changes into a gel-like substance. This type of fiber is important because it **lowers blood sugar levels** by slowing digestion and allowing nutrients to be absorbed slowly into the bloodstream.
- Insoluble fiber does not dissolve in water. This type of fiber remains intact as it goes through the digestive tract. It **acts as a sweeper**, helping to move food through the intestines. It also controls the acidity of the intestines, allowing the microbes to operate optimally, thereby getting the most nutrients from our food. By regulating food movement, this type of fiber helps to promote *regular* bowel movements.

### **Soluble fiber foods include:**

- Oats
- Nuts
- Peas
- Barley
- Seeds; sunflower seeds, flax seeds/meal
- Vegetables; brussels sprouts, broccoli, avocados
- Beans; black beans, kidney beans, lima beans
- Fruits; pears, nectarines, apricots, apples, guava

### Insoluble fiber can be found in:

- Fruits
- Nuts
- Flax seeds or Flax meal
- Seeds
- Potatoes (with skins)
- Vegetables such as celery, green beans, broccoli, cauliflower, leafy greens, avocados
- popcorn
- Wheat bran
- Whole-grain foods such as brown rice, whole grain bread, whole grain pasta

Most foods have both types of fiber present, but some are especially high in one or the other. It's important to get your fiber from a variety of sources to keep our gut microbiome healthy and happy.

### ***What are strategies for increasing fiber?***

- Take in small amounts of fiber throughout the day.
- Add fiber in slowly, so you don't get as much gas/bloating
- Don't overload on unprocessed fiber (raw fiber sources); aim for 25-38 grams per day

Avoid fiber sources that thicken your poop and slow your digestion; ripe banana, applesauce, marshmallow, mashed potato, white rice, white bread, cheese, peanut butter, peas, pasta (soluble fiber sources).

It's also important to drink plenty of water, especially if you are eating a lot of foods with soluble fiber. The extra water will help the soluble fiber form a gel, which assists in digestion and prevents elimination from becoming too slow.

### ***How much water should you be drinking?***

Women should consume 2.7 L/day of total water, which includes fluid and food sources of water. Of the 2.7 Liters, 80% should come from fluids and 20% from food sources. That works out to the following amounts:

Fluids - which include plain water, and liquid beverages

- 2.2 L/day or 74 fluid oz. or 9.25 cups

Food - which include soups, broth, watery fruits

- .5 L/day or 17 fluid oz. or 2 cups

## ***Movement matters!***

When your body is moving on the outside, it means your body is moving on the inside and this includes your colon. Aerobic exercise such as a brisk walk has been shown to decrease the likelihood of constipation. Aim for **30 minutes of movement per day** to help your gut move things through your system and decrease your constipation.

## ***Yes, there is a posture for pooping!***

Just as there is a posture for optimal bladder emptying, there is also a posture for pooping. As it happens, they are similar. To optimize the likelihood of a satisfying poop, make sure you are positioning yourself correctly. The top 5 positioning strategies are listed below.

1. Sit with your legs supported fully. No dangling! If you need support place a small stool under your feet to bring the floor to you.
2. Keeping your spine straight, lean your trunk forward, and rest your hands or forearms on your thighs.
3. Ideally, your knees will be slightly higher than your hips.
4. Relax your belly.
5. Take deep belly breaths to let your pelvic floor muscles relax, allowing for better bowel emptying.

