

Healthy Living for Elders: STAYING REGULAR

Luisa Oliver-Cordero¹



How common is constipation in the elderly?

About 20 percent of elders suffer from constipation. Over time, constipation can cause serious and painful consequences. This includes hemorrhoids, diverticulosis, and impaction.

Impaction is the inability to have a bowel movement.

What causes constipation in elders?

- ▶ Chronic laxative abuse
- ▶ Limited mobility
- ▶ Decreased thirst and fluid intake
- ▶ Poor eating habits
- ▶ Low fiber intake
- ▶ Ignoring the urge to defecate
- ▶ Decreased motility in the colon and rectal sensation

Do medications affect risk for constipation?

Yes. Ask your pharmacist for information about the side effects of each of the medications you are taking. Here are some medications commonly associated with constipation:

- Antacids with aluminum and calcium
- Anticholinergics (in antidepressants and antihistamines)
- Barium
- Calcium channel blockers
- Iron Bismuth



What can I do to prevent constipation and fecal impaction?

- ▶ Be as active as possible every day.
- ▶ Eat about 25-30 grams of fiber a day.
- ▶ Drink 6 to 8 cups or more of water and



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¹Luisa Oliver-Cordero, BS, RD, LD/N, ENAFS Nutrition Educator/Trainer, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-0310. Reviewed by Linda B. Bobroff, PhD, RD, LD/N, Associate Professor, University of Florida.

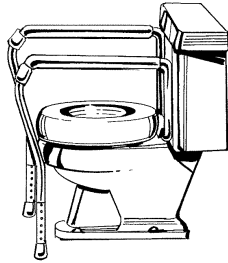


non-caffeinated and non-alcoholic drinks. This is especially important when eating more fiber.

- ▶ Try to eliminate at the same time each day, perhaps after breakfast.



- ▶ Use appropriate assistive devices (walker, handrails by the commode, seat extender), if needed.



- ▶ Use supplements that contain fiber if you are not able to eat enough dietary fiber each day. Talk to your doctor before using fiber supplements.

What is the fiber content of some high fiber foods?

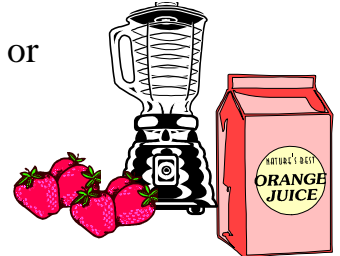
Food	Fiber (grams)
Baked beans (no meat), 1/3 cup*	6-7
Bran cereal, 1 ounce	5-13
Bran muffin, 1 medium	2-4
Fresh fruits, 1 medium	2-4
Broccoli, 1/2 cup	3
(Other vegetables also contain fiber.)	
Nuts, 1/4 cup	2-3
Whole-wheat bread, 1 slice	2-3

* use canned beans, and a smaller portion, if you have a problem with gas.

Can I eat more fiber without eating more food every day?

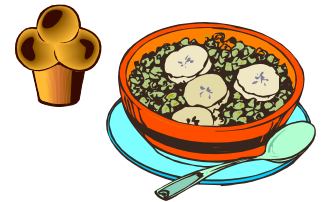
Yes. Here are some ideas to start:

- ▶ Add fresh, frozen or canned fruits to milk or juice, and mix in the blender.



- ▶ Add fruits, vegetables, and nuts in your favorite dish.

- ▶ Select high fiber breads, cereals, and pastas.



- ▶ Use beans and nuts more often for protein instead of meat.

Where can I get more reliable information?

With a registered dietitian or your local county Extension office.

Call your Area Agency on Aging.

At the following Internet sites:

<http://www.seniors.gov>

<http://navigator.tufts.edu>