

# National Cancer Institute

at the National Institutes of Health

[Send to Printer](#)

## Managing Chemotherapy Side Effects

[< Back to Chemotherapy Fact Sheets](#)

Posted: 11/24/2008

### What is constipation?

Are you having bowel movements that come less often than normal for you, are painful, or are hard to pass? This is called "constipation."

Let your doctor or nurse know if you have not had a bowel movement in 2 days or if you have pain in your rectal area.

### Take these steps:



#### Eat high-fiber foods such as:

- Whole-grain breads and cereals
- Fruits and vegetable
- Nuts, seeds, and popcorn



#### Drink lots of liquids.

- Most people need to drink at least 8 cups of liquid every day. Water is a good choice. So are fruit and vegetable juices, such as prune juice.
- Warm liquids such as coffee or tea may help.



#### Try to be active every day.

- Walk or ride an exercise bike for 15 to 30 minutes a day.
- Talk with your doctor to learn about other exercises that can help you.



"I had a hard time going to the bathroom. I also had cramps and gas. Drinking lots of water and eating high-fiber foods, like fruit and whole-grain bread, helped me."

### These foods may help if you are constipated:

<b>Breads and grains</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bran muffins</li> <li>Bran or whole-grain cereals</li> <li>Brown or wild rice</li> <li>Cooked, dried peas and beans (such as pinto, black, red, or kidney)</li> <li>Whole-wheat bread</li> <li>Whole-wheat pasta and tortillas</li> </ul>	
<b>Fruits and vegetables</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dried fruit, such as apricots, dates, prunes, and raisins</li> <li>Fresh fruit, such as apples, blueberries, and grapes</li> <li>Raw or cooked vegetables, such as broccoli, corn, green beans, peas, and spinach</li> </ul>	
<b>Snacks</b>	

Granola  
Nuts  
Popcorn  
Seeds, such as sunflower



**Questions to ask your doctor or nurse:**

1. What problems should I call you about?
2. Should I write down each time I have a bowel movement?
3. How much liquid should I drink each day?
4. What medicines are okay for me to take?
5. What exercises can help me?
6. Can you give me the name of a nutritionist, so I can learn more about foods that might help me?

---

[< Back to Chemotherapy Fact Sheets](#)<sup>1</sup>

[^ Back to Top](#)

## Table of Links

<sup>1</sup><http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/chemo-side-effects>