

Constipation

People normally have bowel movements ranging from a few times a week to two to three times daily. After weight-loss surgery, the number and consistency of bowel movements will change. Missing a bowel movement does not mean you have constipation. Rather, if the consistency of your stool is hard and it is difficult to pass, that is considered constipation.

During the period immediately after weight-loss surgery you will likely have fewer bowel movements. This is because you are eating very little. Later, you may experience constipation. Common causes in the first few months after surgery include inadequate fiber consumption due to limited stomach capacity and an emphasis on eating enough protein. Also, inadequate fluid consumption is a common culprit.

Chronic constipation can be painful and uncomfortable and can also cause more serious health problems. The following tips may help you avoid or manage constipation. However, before you take any supplements or medications to address constipation, discuss your options with your weight-loss surgery team.

Prevention

- Drink adequate fluid (at least 80 to 100 ounces a day is usually desirable).
- Eat high-fiber foods (aim for about 12 to 14 grams of dietary fiber per 1,000 calories).
- Get physical activity daily.
- Don't use unnecessary narcotic pain medications.
- Take a calcium supplement containing magnesium.
- Take an approved fiber supplement (check with your weight-loss surgery team before taking any supplement, and avoid psyllium products).
- Try probiotics.
- Avoid caffeine (it may dehydrate you, which increases your risk for constipation).
- Take a stool softener daily.
- If you take an iron supplement, try one with a stool softener in it.

Reasons to Seek Medical Attention

- If your constipation does not resolve after three days, or if the suggestions listed in the “Prevention” section do not improve your symptoms, contact your weight-loss surgery team.
- Contact your team if your constipation is associated with any of the following:
 - Distended abdomen
 - Vomiting
 - Bloody stools
 - Unexpected weight loss
- Other reasons to contact your team include:
 - Severe constipation
 - Constipation that does not resolve with conservative measures, such as those listed under “Prevention”