

Constipation and Medications

Constipation is one of those subjects we've been told to avoid in polite conversation, but with 50-70% of hospital patients suffering constipation, due to their medications, and a similar percentage of home patients, perhaps it should be up for discussion in an attempt to suggest a solution.

Constipation is a common and bothersome condition and can be potentially dangerous. Patients that are quite well become concerned, even fearful, as the days go by and there is no bowel movement. The thought of hard stools, medical treatment and a painful evacuation is uppermost in the patient's mind.

The first approach is a course of laxatives, however, the patient who has not suffered serious constipation previously has a sense of concern in having to treat the condition with these highly reactive products. It is fair to say that the patient's satisfaction with everyday use of laxatives is rather low. We are also aware that the effect of laxatives varies and is mainly explained by different patient characteristics, and therefore becomes a matter of trial and error for individual patients. On the other hand, most patients would prefer foods that are nutritious that are able to keep the body regular.

The truth is that constipation will often respond to a **high-fibre diet with plentiful fluid consumption**. Fibre is the indigestible part of plant foods, such as vegetables, fruits, grains, beans and legumes. It is a type of carbohydrate that helps keep our digestive systems healthy.

There are three different types of fibre: **Soluble fibre** which helps you feel fuller.

Insoluble fibre absorbs water to help to soften the contents of our bowels and support regular bowel movements. It also helps to keep us full and keep the bowel environment healthy.

Resistant fibre is not digested in the small intestine and instead proceeds to the large intestine where it can assist in the production of good bacteria and improves bowel health.

Good sources of insoluble fibre include:

- Beans, pulses and lentils
- Wholegrain foods such wheat bran, brown rice and couscous
- Root vegetables, such as carrots, parsnips and potatoes
- Celery, cucumbers
- Fruit and especially fruit with edible skins
- Nuts and seeds



Water, place a 2 litre jug of water on the table to remind you that it is an important part of the combination with fibre.

Foods to avoid - those low in fibre and high in fat, for example, cheese.

Geoff