



Tips and Recipes for Constipation

Nutrition and Food Services Healthy Teaching Kitchen



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

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My VA Contact Information

VA Medical Center Location Name and Address:

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Tips for Managing Constipation

Are you having bowel movements that come less often than normal for you, are painful, or are hard to pass? Constipation can be caused by a physical blockage or pressure of your bowel, medications, not eating enough fiber, not drinking enough fluids, inactivity, or a combination of these. Here are some tips to help reduce constipation:

Drink Plenty of Fluids*

*Unless you are told not to by a healthcare provider.

Most people need to drink at least 8 cups (64 ounces) of liquid every day. The color of your urine is typically light yellow to clear when you are well-hydrated. Water is a good liquid choice, but not the only one. Other options include fruit and vegetable juices, such as prune juice. Warm liquids such as coffee or tea may also help.

Eat Fiber-Rich Foods

- Whole-grain breads and cereals, bran muffins or bran cereals, brown rice or wild rice, cooked or canned legumes (e.g. peas, lentils, pinto beans, black beans), whole wheat bread, whole wheat pasta, and whole-wheat tortillas.
- Fresh or frozen fruit such as apples, blueberries, bananas, and grapes. Dried fruit such as apricots, dates, prunes, and raisins. Raw or cooked vegetables such as carrots, broccoli, beets, green beans, and spinach.
- Nuts, seeds, granola, popcorn, and whole-grain crackers

Try to Be Active Everyday

Consider low-impact exercises (e.g. walking, riding an exercise bike, swimming) for 15-30 minutes a day. Talk with your doctor or physical therapist to learn about other exercises that can help you.

Talk to Your Healthcare Team

Ask your healthcare provider about medications that may be helpful in managing constipation. Be sure you understand how much medication to take, how often to take it, and how to adjust it when needed.

Keep a journal of how often you are moving your bowels, what is the stool like (hard, medium, soft), what bowel medication you are taking, and how much bowel medication you are taking daily. This will help your provider adjust your medications if needed. **Call your healthcare team** if you haven't moved your bowels in 2 days.



One-Pot Curried Lentil Soup

Prep: 15 minutes | Cook: 25 minutes | Total: 40 minutes

Yield: 6 servings | Serving Size: 1½ cups

Ingredients

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil or canola oil
½ small onion, diced (about ½ cup)
4 medium carrots, thinly sliced (about 2 cups)
1 teaspoon salt
3 cloves garlic, minced (about 1½-3 teaspoons)
1 tablespoon ginger, minced or grated (or ¼ teaspoon ground ginger)
1 tablespoon curry powder
Pinch cayenne (optional)
3 cups vegetable broth
1 cup coconut milk
1 cup uncooked red or golden lentils, rinsed and picked through to remove any stones
1 tablespoon soy sauce

Directions

1. Heat a large saucepan or other large pot over medium heat.
2. Add the oil and heat until shimmering.
3. Add the onion, carrots, and salt. Cook, stirring often, for 3-5 minutes.
4. Add garlic, ginger, curry powder, and cayenne (if using). Cook, stirring often, until fragrant, about 2-3 minutes.
5. Add the broth and coconut milk.
6. Bring to a low boil over high heat, then reduce the heat to a simmer.
7. Add the lentils and soy sauce. Stir to combine.
8. Cook uncovered, stirring occasionally, until the lentils are tender, about 15-20 minutes.
9. Serve warm.

Recipe Notes

- This soup tastes even better the next day.
- Stir in 1-2 cups of fresh baby spinach at the end of cooking to add color and texture variety.

**Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 210 | Total Fat: 6 g | Saturated Fat: 5 g
Sodium: 900 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 27 g | Dietary Fiber: 5 g | Protein: 12 g**

Adapted from minimalistbaker.com | Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD, CSO

For more recipes, please visit www.nutrition.va.gov



Fig Bran Muffins

Prep: 15 minutes | Cook: 25 minutes | Total: 40 minutes

Yield: 12 servings | Serving Size: 1 muffin

Ingredients

- 1½ cups bran cereal
- 1 cup milk (dairy or non-dairy)
- ¾ cup unsweetened applesauce
- ½ cup sugar-based sweetener (e.g. sugar, honey, maple syrup, agave)
- ⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil or canola oil
- 2 tablespoons molasses
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 1½ cups white whole-wheat flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 cup chopped dried figs
- Nonstick cooking spray

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Add the bran cereal and milk to a large mixing bowl. Let sit until softened, about 5 minutes.
3. Add the applesauce, sweetener, oil, molasses, and egg. Stir until combined.
4. In a separate medium mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, salt, and cinnamon.
5. Add the flour mixture to the cereal-milk mixture and stir until just combined.
6. Gently stir in the chopped figs.
7. Spray the inside of a 12-cup muffin pan with cooking spray.
8. Spoon the batter into the prepared muffin pan.
9. Bake until muffins bounce back when pressed on, about 18-22 minutes.
10. Let the muffins cool in the pan for 15 minutes, then use a butter knife to loosen the muffins from the pan and serve.

Recipe Notes

- Try substituting pitted dates for the dried figs.

**Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 230 | Total Fat: 8 g | Saturated Fat: 1 g
Sodium: 170 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 42 g | Dietary Fiber: 6 g | Protein: 5 g**

Adapted from Ellie Krieger, RD | Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD. CSO

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Creamy Broccoli Soup

Prep: 15 minutes | Cook: 25 minutes | Total: 40 minutes

Yield: 6 servings | Serving Size: 2 cups

Ingredients

3 tablespoons butter
2 medium leeks, white and light-green parts only, sliced
2 stalks celery, thinly sliced (about ½ cup)
8 cups broccoli florets (about 1¼ pounds)
2 cloves garlic, minced (about 1-2 teaspoons)
4 cups (32 ounces) reduced-sodium vegetable or chicken broth
1 teaspoon whole fresh thyme leaves (or ¼ teaspoon dried thyme)
½ teaspoon salt
1 cup half-and-half or milk

Directions

1. Melt butter in a large saucepan or other large pot over medium-high heat.
2. Add the leeks and celery. Cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 6-8 minutes.
3. Add the broccoli and garlic. Cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 30-60 seconds.
4. Add the broth and bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce the heat to medium.
5. Cover the pot with a lid and cook until the broccoli is tender, about 10-15 minutes.
6. Add the thyme and salt.
7. Puree the soup with an immersion (handheld) blender until smooth, about 2-5 minutes.
8. Add half-and-half or milk and process just until incorporated, about 15 seconds.
9. Serve warm.

Recipe Notes

- This soup will keep in the refrigerator for 3-4 days.
- Try substituting bone broth for the vegetable or chicken broth. Bone broth provides additional nutrients and protein.
- If you don't have an immersion blender, complete Steps 7-8 using a standing blender. Transfer the soup to the blender, filling it no more than halfway. Remove the center piece of blender lid to allow steam to escape, then secure the lid on the blender. Place a clean kitchen towel over the opening in the lid and blend until smooth, about 2 minutes. Transfer the pureed soup to a large bowl and repeat the process with any remaining soup.

**Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 160 | Total Fat: 10 g | Saturated Fat: 6 g
Sodium: 800 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 13 g | Dietary Fiber: 3.5 g | Protein: 5 g**

Adapted from Eatingwell.com | Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD, CSO

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Apple-Pear Sauce

Prep: 10 minutes | Cook: 30 minutes | Total: 40 minutes

Yield: 8 servings | Serving Size: ½ cup

Ingredients

- 5 medium sweet apples (e.g. Gala, Macintosh, Fuji), peeled, cored and sliced (about 1½ pounds)
- 4 medium ripe pears, peeled, cored and sliced (about 2 pounds)
- ½ cup water
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- 1-3 tablespoons maple syrup or honey, to taste (optional)

Directions

1. In a large saucepan or other large pot, add the apples, pears, water, lemon juice, cinnamon, and ginger.
2. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce the heat to medium-low to maintain a simmer.
3. Cook until the apples and pears are very soft, about 25-30 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Remove the pot from the heat.
5. Use an immersion (handheld) blender to blend the mixture into a smooth sauce, or use a potato masher for a chunkier sauce.
6. Taste and add maple syrup or honey if more sweetness is desired.
7. Serve warm, or chill in the refrigerator before serving if desired. This sauce will keep in the refrigerator for 5-7 days, or in the freezer for up to 3 months.

**Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 125 | Total Fat: 1 g | Saturated Fat: 0 g
Sodium: 30 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 31 g | Dietary Fiber: 5.5 g | Protein: 1 g**

Adapted from TwoPeasAndTheirPod.com | Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD, CSO
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