

NUTRITION



F A C T S H E E T

Preventing Constipation By Promoting Healthy Habits

Today's fast-paced lifestyles often promote unhealthy habits which can contribute to constipation. Keeping a closer eye on your diet, exercise routine, and bathroom habits can help prevent problems. Often, something as simple as drinking a few more cups of water or adding more walking to your daily routine can bring your digestive system back to normal.

Constipation Is A Common Occurrence

Almost everyone experiences a bout of constipation at some point in their lives. Constipation affects 2% of the U.S. population, more frequently occurring in women and the elderly. For most individuals, constipation is an occasional, temporary condition and not a serious health concern. Maintaining a healthy life-style will often relieve and prevent constipation.

What Is Constipation?

Constipation means that a person has two or fewer bowel movements in a week. The typical length of time between bowel movements can vary greatly from person to person. While some people have three bowel movements a day, others may only have three in a week; both are normal. If this frequency decreases significantly, if there is pain or if the stools passed are very hard, an individual may be considered constipated.

What Causes Constipation?

There are many reasons people become constipated. Common causes include:

- A diet low in fiber and not drinking enough liquids
- Lack of physical activity
- Prescription Medications: Among them are: pain medications, antacids, blood pressure

medications, iron supplements, diuretics (water pills), anti-Parkinson drugs, antispasmodics, antidepressants and anticonvulsants. If you're experiencing constipation, and currently taking any medications, ask your doctor or pharmacist whether any of them may be associated with constipation.

- Certain Medical Conditions: Although less common, constipation is sometimes caused by medical conditions such as hypothyroidism or neurological disorders like Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis. Consult with your physician concerning constipation that may be related to any medical condition.
- Changes in your regular routine: Changes in routine, such as traveling, can disrupt your usual diet and activity schedules resulting in constipation.

Healthy Habits to Help Prevent Constipation

- Eat a variety of foods high in fiber such as whole grains, bran, beans, fruits and vegetables. Try to include at least 3 ounces of whole grains, 2 cups of fruit and 2 ½ cups of vegetables every day.

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- Drink plenty of liquids – at least 8 cups of fluids a day.
- Be active everyday. Regular physical activity helps prevent constipation. Vigorous exercise isn't necessary. A simple 20 to 30 minute daily walk can help.
- Take regular bathroom breaks. Repeatedly ignoring the urge or just delaying a stop at the bathroom can lead to constipation.

When Diet And Lifestyle Changes Don't Work

Sometimes constipation fails to respond to positive changes in diet and lifestyle. When this happens, a laxative may be the solution.

Seek the advice of your physician if you have frequent constipation, regularly take prescription medications or have chronic medical conditions.

ROASTED STUFFED PEPPERS WITH FRESH CORN & ZUCCHINI

Serves 6

- 6 large red bell peppers, halved lengthwise, seeded; buy with stems intact
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 medium red onion, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 2 jalapeño peppers, seeded and minced
- 1 ½ pounds small zucchini, trimmed and diced (about 4 zucchini)
- 2 cups fresh corn kernels (2 to 3 ears)
- ½ cup chopped fresh cilantro
- ½ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 3 ounces low-fat Monterey jack cheese, grated (about ¾ cup)

1. Preheat the oven to 450°F. Lightly oil a baking sheet and a 9 x 13-inch baking dish.
2. Put the peppers, cut side down, on the baking sheet and bake for 8 to 10 minutes, until just tender. Remove the peppers from the oven and reduce the oven temperature to 375°F. Arrange the peppers, cut side up, in the baking dish.
3. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, 3 to 5

minutes. Add the garlic and jalapeños and cook, stirring, for about 1 minute. Add the zucchini and corn, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are tender, about 10 minutes. Stir in the cilantro and parsley and season with salt and pepper to taste.

4. Spoon about ¾ cup of filling into each pepper half. Sprinkle each with cheese. (At this point, the peppers can be allowed to cool to room temperature, covered and refrigerated for up to 24 hours.)
5. Add about 2 tablespoons of water into the dish, cover with foil, and bake the peppers until heated through, about 20 minutes. Uncover and bake until the cheese is soft and melted, about 5 minutes longer. Serve at once.

Nutritional content per serving; 6 servings per recipe: Cals: 177; % of cals. from fat: 22; fat: 5g; Sat. fat: 2g; Carbs: 28g; Fiber: 7g; Sugars: 16g; Cholesterol: 10mg; Protein: 10g; Sodium: 332mg

The Diabetes Menu Cookbook: Delicious special-occasion recipes for family and friends by Barbara Scott-Goodman and Kalia Doner; John Wiley & Sons 2006

For a referral to a registered dietitian and for additional food and nutrition information visit
WWW.EATRIGHT.ORG

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