

# Nutrition News!

## Edition 2: Constipation and Fibre Intake

### May 2011



Regular bowel movements are essential for good health however many people wrongly assume that a daily bowel action is necessary and that anything less is constipation. Normal bowels may empty anything from three times a day to once every three days. Constipation is straining and having difficulty passing stools, which are usually hard and dry.

#### Constipation may occur due to:

- A diet low in fibre
- A diet low in fluids
- A small and inadequate dietary intake
- Inadequate physical activity
- Bad toilet habits such as not going when the need arises
- Excessive long term use of laxatives. These can interfere with the proper function of the colon, which then comes to depend on laxatives.
- The side effects of some medications (e.g. medications that contain codeine or morphine, iron tablets and antidepressants)

Constipation is a common problem in older people. It causes problems for their health and for the carers who care for them.



Nutrition News is produced by Northern Sydney HACC Dietitians for HACC Staff and Service Coordinators

Get this newsletter for **FREE** on PDF.  
Email your service's details and contacts to your HACC Dietitian: Caryn Kneale  
[ckneale@nscchhs.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:ckneale@nscchhs.health.nsw.gov.au)

#### Complications of constipation:

- **A loss of appetite** – Being “blocked up” usually means less desire to eat. This is a big problem and can contribute to under-nutrition and weight loss. Any loss of appetite should prompt an enquiry about bowel function. Constipation needs to be addressed so that appetite and food intake can return.
- **A blocked bowel** – The bowel can become so packed with hard, dry faeces that the muscles of the bowels can't push it out.
- **Faecal incontinence** – “Dribbling” diarrhoea is often not true diarrhoea but the result of an overfull and constipated bowel.
- **Urinary incontinence** – Constant straining weakens pelvic floor muscles and increases the risk of the unintentional passing of urine.

#### What can we do about it?

##### Good Nutrition

##### – Everyone's Business

HACC services are ideally positioned to pass on knowledge about good nutrition to clients, whether they provide domestic assistance or centre based care. What can you suggest to your clients? Find out over the page.

# Do you become constipated or need to increase your fibre intake?

**To help prevent constipation and improve bowel regularity, follow these ideas:**

- Start the day with a bowl of high fibre cereal or oats.
- Choose wholemeal or wholegrain bread.
- Incorporate plenty of vegetables or salad each day. For even more fibre eat edible skins eg. of carrots, potatoes, pears, apples
- Choose fruit, dried fruit or nuts instead for snacks.
- Use legumes (e.g. kidney beans, chickpeas, soy beans and lentils) in soups and casseroles, or use them as the base of your meal.
- Baked beans on toast make a great high fibre meal or snack.
- Try using wholemeal pasta, brown rice or barley in place of white rice or pasta.
- Add 1-2 teaspoons of psyllium husks to cereal or fruit juice.
- Prunes or prune juice are a great way to increase your fibre intake.
- Choose fruit based desserts such as fruit crumble, baked apples or stewed fruit ... (and enjoy them with custard or yoghurt!)
- Increase fluid intake - aim to drink at least 1.5 -2 litres a day. **Remember it is important to drink plenty of fluids when increasing your intake of high fibre foods.** These fluids DO NOT have to be only water. For those who are underweight, eating poorly or losing weight, nourishing fluids are best eg. milk, smoothies, coffee made on milk, fruit juice, soups, etc.
- At first, Increasing fibre intake may lead to some discomfort such as wind or bloating. To avoid this, gradually increase your intake of high fibre foods so that your body can adapt, and make sure you also increase your fluid intake.

