

How do you manage constipation after surgery?

Constipation is common after surgery, especially while you are taking pain medicine and your activity level is decreased.

How to prevent constipation

Drink six to eight 8-ounce glasses of liquids each day. Caffeine or alcohol can make constipation worse.

Eat foods with plenty of fiber including whole-grain bread, bran cereals, and fresh fruit and vegetables.

Be as active as you can each day.

Try to have a bowel movement when you feel the urge. Do not ignore the urge. Try to set aside some time after breakfast or dinner to sit on the toilet.

Use of constipation medicines

You may need to take a laxative to prevent constipation as long as you are taking prescription pain medicine. Common products include:

stimulant laxatives. These cause the colon to have a bowel movement. This is the best choice when your constipation is caused by a prescription pain medicine. Examples include senna (Senokot®), bisacodyl (Dulcolax®, Correctol®) and polyethylene glycol (MiraLAX®). Follow package directions.

stool softeners. These add moisture to the stools to make the stool softer and easier to pass. These may not be enough to prevent constipation while you are taking a prescription pain medicine. An example is docusate (Colace®). Follow package directions.

Laxatives and stool softeners can be bought at most local grocery stores, drugstores and large retailers.

Read the label carefully and follow package directions. Talk with your pharmacist if you have any questions.

Stop taking a laxative or stool softener when you stop taking opioid medicines.