



Nutrition for Older Adults: Constipation and Nutrition

EXTENSION

April 2021

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Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets
are also available on our website at:
extension.okstate.edu

Constipation

Constipation is a problem for many older adults. The intestine tends to lose strength and flexibility with age. This causes slower motility. Some medicines can also cause constipation.

Factors which help combat constipation are:

- Fiber
- Fluids
- Physical activity

Fiber

Fiber is helpful for many conditions including constipation.

Foods are the best way to increase fiber intake. Foods with fiber include fruits; vegetables; whole grains; beans, peas and lentils; nuts and seeds.

Increase fiber in the diet slowly. Increasing fiber too fast may cause bloating and gas. Fiber absorbs water so drink plenty of water when increasing fiber.

Check with your doctor before increasing fiber. Fiber intake may be limited

if you have chewing, swallowing or other medical problems.

Water

Water is also important to tackle constipation.

Recommend fluid intake is 13 cups of fluid a day for males and 9 cups a day for females. Water can come in many forms:

- Water
- Juice
- Milk
- Soup

Although fluids are available many older adults become dehydrated. Older adults are at higher risk of dehydration due to:

- Decreased body water.
- Decreased thirst sensation.
- Increased water loss by some medicines.
- Limiting fluid intake due to fear of incontinence.

- Limiting fluid intake due to problems getting to the bathroom

Physical Activity

Physical activity can help reduce constipation. For health benefits recommendations are at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week, or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate and vigorous-intensity physical activity.

Physical activity is anything where you move your body such as walking, riding a bike, swimming, yard work or gardening.

Tips for Constipation

- Drink adequate fluids, 13 cups of fluid a day for males and 9 cups a day for females.

- Have fluids at meals and snacks.
- Keep fluids at hand in a pitcher or glass to help with fluid intake.
- Decreased strength can make it difficult to lift a full glass or pour water from a pitcher. If a person is weak using a small glass or a straw can help with fluid intake.
- Eat plenty of fiber from fruits, vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals, dried peas and beans, nuts and seeds.
- Get at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week, or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate and vigorous-intensity physical activity.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President for Agricultural Programs and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 20 cents per copy. Revised 04/2021 GH.