

# tips

## Healthy bowel habits



Australian Government  
Department of Veterans' Affairs

### Exercise

Exercise helps regular bowel movements. If you can, walk for half an hour each day. If you are not able to move about easily, sitting up in bed instead of lying down or taking a short walk around your room, can help.

**For more help with your diet, fluid intake or exercise speak to your doctor.**

### Laxatives

If increased fluids, fibre and exercise don't help then you may need to take laxatives.

In most circumstances you will need to take the laxative for a short period of time. Your doctor can help you decide which laxative is best for you.

Laxatives can have side effects. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting a laxative.

**Long-term use of laxatives when not required can worsen constipation and may have serious side effects.**

You can improve your bowel function by going to the toilet as soon as you feel the urge.

People living in a nursing home may have difficulty in finding a quiet and private toilet to encourage emptying of the bowel. If you have this problem, speak to your carer.

### Veterans' MATES

[www.dva.gov.au/health/veteransmates](http://www.dva.gov.au/health/veteransmates)

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### Veterans' MATES

## What you can do about Constipation

Get the best from your medicines



# what

## What is **constipation**?

Constipation is difficulty in producing a bowel movement or a decrease in the number of bowel movements.

Most people move their bowels between three times a day and three times a week. Every person is different and moving the bowel fewer than three times a week may still be considered normal for you. People do not need to move their bowels every day. If you notice a change in your bowel habit talk to your doctor.

Constipation is a very common condition and if left untreated can lead to serious problems such as bladder and bowel incontinence.

**It is important to talk to your doctor about how to treat and prevent constipation.**



# what

## What causes **constipation**?

People may become constipated because of:

- a diet low in fibre
- not drinking enough water
- low levels of exercise (especially for people who are confined to bed or not able to move about very well)
- a medical condition
- one or more of the medicines they take.

### **Medicines and constipation.**

Many medicines can cause constipation. If you are taking any medicine and are constipated, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.



# tips

## What can I **do**?

You can prevent constipation by having a diet high in fibre, drinking plenty of fluids (water is best) and exercising.

### **A high fibre diet**

Fibre makes stools softer and wetter and therefore easier to pass. Fibre is found in foods such as vegetables (particularly beans, peas and broccoli), fruits (dried fruit, bananas, prunes and avocados), wholegrain cereals (bran cereals, barley) and breads.

Gradually increasing the amount of fibre in your diet over a couple of weeks will help to avoid bloating and wind.

### **Plenty of fluids**

For most people, up to eight glasses of water a day will ensure good bowel movements. If you have heart or kidney disease you may not be able to drink that much. Check your daily fluid needs with your doctor.

