Nutrition for Older Adults: Constipation and Nutrition

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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, dried peas and beans, 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.

Water

Water is also important to tackle constipation.

Older adults need 6 to 8 cups of water each day. 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.

Check with your doctor before increasing fiber. Fiber intake may be limited if you have chewing, swallowing or other medical problems.
• 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 get 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each week.
Physical activity is anything where you move your body such as walking, riding a bike, swimming, yard work or gardening.

Tips for Constipation
• Drink six to eight cups of water each day.
• 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 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each week.

Sources