

# BOWEL TROUBLES

## Patient TIPS for Living with Kidney Disease

---



### **DIALYSIS & BOWELS: What's the connection?**

Constipation can be a real problem when you are on kidney dialysis. Some reasons for this problem are:

- Your diet may be low in fibre due to certain restrictions on fruits and vegetables
- You may not be as active as before
- You need to limit your fluid intake
- Some of your pills may be causing constipation, eg. - TUMS and iron

## Diet tips to help with constipation

The foods you choose each day can help with constipation problems. Try the following diet suggestions:

- Select fresh fruits and vegetables each day from those allowed in your diet.
  - Choose vegetables which are high in fibre such as green peas, brussels sprouts, corn, green or wax beans, broccoli, carrots, eggplant and parsnips.
  - Choose fibre rich fruits, eg. pears, rhubarb and berries.
- Other high fibre boosters are whole wheat and rye breads, popcorn (no salt!), barley, bulgar, and shredded wheat cereals.
- Prune juice is a high potassium natural laxative. Ask your dietitian before using prune juice.
- Very high fibre foods e.g. wheat germ, raw bran or flaxseed meal may be added to cereals, yogurt, soups, blender drinks, muffins or cookies. However, you must limit to 2 tablespoons a day. More than this amount is unsafe for patients who must limit their fluid intake. These foods are also high in phosphate, ask your dietitian if wheat germ, raw bran or flaxseed meal are okay for you.
- Avoid processed bran cereals such as Bran Buds or All Bran: They are very high in potassium, sodium and phosphate.

**If you are not having a soft bowel movement every one to two days, follow the drug routine.**

## Kidney Bowel Routine

**To soften hard bowel movements try a stool softener called Docusate sodium:**

- Docusate comes in 100 mg capsules. Try 2 capsules daily (200 mg a day). You may increase this to 2 capsules twice daily (400 mg a day).
- Docusate can be taken once, twice or three times daily as needed. Your doctor may recommend up to 9 capsules daily.

\*Take your stool softener every day for best effect. It works well, but not quickly.

**If you are constipated (not having a bowel movement every 1 or 2 days) you may need a laxative:**

- Try Lactulose 30 ml (2 tablespoons) twice daily.

**If you are already taking a stool softener, continue to take it as well.**

- If you do not have a bowel movement, take Lactulose 30 ml 3 times daily. Still no bowel movement?... see next section.

**For more difficult constipation problems you may need more medication:**

- Continue your stool softener and Lactulose 30 mL 3 times daily.
- Add Sennosides 2 tablets before bed.  
No bowel movement? Increase to 3 to 4 sennoside tablets before bed. Sennosides are available as 8.6mg and 12mg tablets – either strength is okay to use.
- If you are still not having bowel movements, try a suppository (glycerin or bisacodyl).  
If this fails, contact your doctor. **DON'T WAIT!**

**When your bowels do move:**

- Continue the stool softener (Docusate) and, if needed, Lactulose 30 ml (2 tablespoons) at bedtime to maintain soft, easy to pass bowel movements every 1 to 2 days. These two medications can be taken safely on a regular basis if needed.

\*Do not stop the medication unless you are having diarrhea.

### Cautions:

- Sennosides should not be taken for more than 7 days in a row unless your doctor okays it.
- Do not use Magnolax or Milk of Magnesia (the high magnesium content is not good for people with kidney problems) or Fleet enemas (they are high in phosphorus).

For more copies, go online at <http://vch.eduhealth.ca>  
or email [phem@vch.ca](mailto:phem@vch.ca) and quote Catalogue No. **FP.450.D541**  
© Vancouver Coastal Health, November 2005

The information in this document is intended solely for the person  
to whom it was given by the health care team.  
[www.vch.ca](http://www.vch.ca)