

## Post-operative Constipation

You are likely to experience post-operative constipation, even if you have regular bowel movements prior to having surgery. Constipation is a common side effect from surgery that people often don't expect. It may occur as a result of using narcotic pain relievers, general anesthesia, an electrolyte/fluid imbalance, prolonged inactivity, and changes to your diet due to recent surgery.

Please review the information below to help prevent/treat post-operative constipation:

1. Get moving – Start walking as soon as possible after surgery. This will depend on what type of surgery you had so verify with your physician/physician's team if you have questions.
2. Decrease use of narcotic pain medication – Postoperative narcotics slow down the motility of your gut so try to decrease the amount you are taking as soon as you are able to do so.
3. Maintain a well-balanced diet – Drink plenty of fluids, avoid caffeine, consume fiber-rich food (whole grains, fresh fruits/vegetables, beans) and add in additional sources of fiber if necessary (Benefiber/Metamucil)
4. Start stool softeners such as Docusate Calcium immediately after surgery while taking narcotic pain medication to help prevent constipation.

If you feel that you are experiencing constipation here are some options to start with:

1. Try over the counter stool softeners – Follow dosing instructions on package, drink plenty of water, and check with your pharmacist if you need suggestions on which brand to buy
  - a. Docusate Sodium/Senna-S/Colace are examples of stool softener that contain a laxative. Their goal is to make stool easy to pass. There are many different brands available over the counter at your local pharmacy/grocery store that you may try.
  - b. Stool softeners such as Docusate Calcium are often a good medication to add immediately after surgery to help prevent constipation, but may not be enough alone to treat constipation.
2. Try over the counter laxatives – Follow dosing instructions on package, drink plenty of water, and check with your pharmacist if you need suggestions on which brand to buy
  - a. Miralax, Milk of Magnesia – laxatives that come in gel/capsule/liquid form
  - b. Magnesium Citrate – next level of laxative that typically comes in liquid form
  - c. Rectal suppository – suppository must be inserted into your rectum

If you continue to have complaints of constipation despite trying all these recommendations please reach out to your physician. At that time, it may be recommended you follow up with your primary care physician for further evaluation and treatment options.

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