

## Bowel Regularity

There is a wide range of “normal” when it comes to bowel movements: from 3 times a week up to 3 times a day! Constipation is defined as less than 3 bowel movements a week, with poop that is hard to pass. We may notice it looks like small pellets, or a lumpy sausage shape. Our normal patterns can change for lots of reasons. Some of those include:

- Medications: painkillers, sedatives or tranquilizers, antidepressants, iron supplements
- Not drinking a lot of water or other fluids
- Prolonged illness or other high stress situations for the body
- Neurological diseases or injuries: stroke, spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s disease
- Diet changes or imbalances (e.g. diet high in fats and sugars)
- Using lots of laxatives

If you have noticed a recent change and aren’t sure why this has happened, please speak to your doctor, pelvic physical therapist or nutritionist/dietitian. The recipe below will create more regular bowel function by increasing the amount of fiber you’re taking in. Increasing fiber can make us feel bloated or gassy, but this should resolve on its own in a few weeks.

### Bowel Regularity Recipe

**1 cup applesauce + 1 cup oat bran or unprocessed wheat bran + 1 cup prune juice (or pear juice)**

Mix ingredients together. You’ll only be using small amounts, so you can store each serving in an ice cube tray in the fridge or freezer to use as needed.

Start with 1-2 tablespoons each evening mixed with or followed by an 8 oz cup of water. The bowel is a bit of a slow learner, so it may take up to 2 weeks to help get your bowel movements softer and more regular.

If you don’t notice a change, increase to 3-4 tablespoons. Before trying this, please run it by your doctor.

## Pro Tips

**Don’t strain while you’re on the toilet.** It makes your pelvic muscles weaker, raises your blood pressure, increases pressure in the chest, can cause shortness of breath and (in people with cardiac issues) can cause an irregular heart rate. Not sure how to poop without pushing? There ARE better ways to do it! Look for the toileting videos on the website.

**Avoid using enemas or laxatives.** It seems like they should help, but they actually make it harder for the bowels to work properly! Think of it like always using crutches instead of learning how to make your legs stronger and getting more confident and steady when walking.

**Constipation can cause bladder control problems.** The increased pressure of poop in our rectum can bother the bladder and give you a sense of urgency (like you need to pee all the time), or cause incontinence of urine (leakage). If you notice you’re having bladder issues, the first step is to make sure things on the ‘back end’ are working properly. You can talk to a pelvic physical therapist about this: searchable directory links are on the site.

**Use the Bristol Stool Scale.** It’s a handy visual tool to help you figure out if your poop is normal or needs some help. There is a printable copy on the website for you to use.