

## **Are you constipated?**

Approximately 100 million people in the United States suffer from constipation and that these people spend \$700 million yearly on constipation-relief products. What a shame when constipation is easily avoided through healthy diet and cleansing.



### **Eating fruits**

Fruits are expensive and most people in Sri Lanka unfortunately cannot afford to eat daily. They contain high fibre, forms bulk in your gut and makes your smooth muscles activated and with water helps stools the right consistency to pass easily. Dried fruits are loaded with fibre and is one of the foods that help relieve constipation. Bananas, figs, prunes, apples, mangoes. Mangoes are seasonal, and available in Sri Lanka during certain months of the year. They are low-calorie and high in fibre and is a great source of vitamin A and C, contains calcium, zinc, and vitamin E. There is a remarkably high fibre mango called 'Kohu amba' in Sinhalese. Kohu means fibre. There is one kind of mango sold in Florida called Valencia Pride. The flavour is sweet, aromatic, firm and has no fibre.

A pilot study from Texas A&M University revealed that consuming mangoes is more helpful in relieving constipation than taking an equivalent amount of fibre powder.

Eat an avocado and a segment of papaw daily, I bet you will never be constipated. Avocado being creamy fatty and buttery should be the best healthiest lubricant for your bowel action. Most people are not aware of foods containing high fibre, and most affordable for daily consumption- for instance unprocessed red rice vs, processed white rice.

You need to get 30g of fibre daily in your diet to have a soft stool.

Your morning cereal like oats is a good choice for your daily breakfast. Add a few slices of ripe banana and blur berries (if available) to make it attractive and palatable.

It is advisable to eat bananas that are a bit green, because they have less sugar and suitable for people having diabetes.

Apples have 2-3 g of fibre and is also a good choice for daily consumption to prevent constipation.

Choose wholemeal or whole grain bread instead of white processed bread. Likewise, always eat unprocessed rice, like the brown and red.

The other foods that are high fibre are baked potatoes, wholemeal pasta, and pulses.

Sri Lankans love eating lentils with rice and bread. They have high dietary fibre, both soluble and insoluble. Insoluble fibre passes out of your gut and help prevent colon cancer.

Other legumes, nuts and seeds that have high fibre are, baked beans, canned beans, Chia seeds, boiled black beans, among others.

One side effect from seeds pulses and seeds are abdominal distention, unfortunately.

Some foods can make you constipated, such as alcohol, gluten containing foods, processed grains as mentioned, milk and dairy products, red meat (has no fibre), fried or fast foods, among others.

Fruit juices containing fibre, sorbitol and water can help relieve constipation. Good examples are prune juice, lemon juice and apple juice.

It is preferred to have the whole fruit than the juices, in general to relieve constipation.

Coffee is a good choice when you are constipated. Warming herbs like ginger tea can help speed up sluggish digestion. Hot or iced black tea may have a mild laxative effect. Adding honey or molasses to your tea helps as a laxative property.

Supplements and aperients are habit forming and should not be taken on a regular basis when there are natural avenues of handling the issues. Furthermore, the gut friendly microbes don't like either altering its diversity and ecosystem.

Let us discuss other foods that give you constipation. Too much cheese and milk can block you up. Cheese is so expensive and most people eat it rarely. Milk and anything that falls in the 'dairy' category is on the list of constipation. Milk seems to solidify when it enters your gut. Eating starchy foods generally do constipate; Calcium in milk tends to constipate, too.

Kids tend to get constipated on formulae milk and prune juice seems to be one of the best to make their bowels move.

Age seems to be one cause of constipation. People over 65 seem to suffer from it considerably due to sluggish bowel movements. Most elderly people who don't get

enough food get constipated. Lactose intolerance is another cause in the elderly due to deficiency of lactase enzyme.

Certain medications cause constipation like aluminium antacids, calcium channel blockers for hypertension, diuretics, antipsychotics or tricyclic antidepressants, anti-inflammatory agents for arthritis and some anticonvulsants given for epilepsy.

Young people get constipated due to lack of exercise, a low fibre diet and low fluid intake.

You need to drink lots of water daily to move the stool into the large bowel and out of the system.

Just because you don't have a motion daily does not mean that you are constipated. It is all a constitutional habit: some do go about three times a day or less and some go every second day. So long as you feel comfortable there is no problem. When you are constipated, you bloat, get abdominal pain and colic, inability to concentrate on your work, and may have rectal bleeding due to straining at defaecation.

Daily overstraining may give haemorrhoid and with further neglect prolapse of your rectum. In rare cases, progressively worse constipation may be a symptom of a tumour in the colo-rectal region, and colonoscopy may be required to diagnose the condition. It is always good to remember that early symptom of colo-rectum cancer is change of bowel movements.

#### Fast or prepared foods

Most readymade food you eat from food outlets are low fibre and you may get constipated if you regularly eat them. Fried foods are full of fat and hard to digest. When such stools pass through the large bowel more water is absorbed due to the slow motion of such fatty food. In some people fatty food helps to have a comfortable motion, due to the lubricant activity of the oil.

Eggs are high in protein but low in fibre. Try to mix with high fibre foods when you eat eggs. Try dark greens like spinach and tomatoes in your omelette.

There are certain bowel diseases that can cause constipation and diarrhoea. In irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) once referred to as a spastic colon in addition to bowel symptoms may cause alternate bouts of diarrhoea and constipation

It is advisable to see your doctor if you have any change of bowel habits. He will organize a Barium Meal and enema x-rays and endoscopies to rule out diseases causing the problem.

If these methods fail a stool softener like Coloxyl (not available in Sri Lanka) would be the best to have a good soft bulky comfortable stool.

Eating too much of dietary fibre in foods can have side effects. They can irritate a sensitive bowel and exacerbate gut symptoms like distension, bloating, pain, and increased diarrhoea.

Eating Kohila (*Lasia spinosa*) cooked as a curry can cause severe abdominal colic and may need medical treatment in such a situation.

Kohila has benefits too, such as it removes unnecessary toxins in the intestines and it increases appetite and body weight, reduces urine output and burning sensation in the body. It also expels worms, rare today.

Good advice by Dr harold

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