

The High-Fiber Diet for Constipation

A Practical Guide to Eating More Fiber, and the Right Kind

Why Fiber Helps With Constipation

Fiber comes in two types, and they work differently. **Soluble fiber** dissolves in water to form a gel, which softens stool and helps it hold water as it moves through the colon — this is the type with the strongest evidence specifically for constipation. **Insoluble fiber** doesn't dissolve; it adds bulk that helps stimulate the colon to keep things moving. Most whole foods contain a mix of both, but knowing which type a food leans toward helps explain why some high-fiber foods work better for constipation than others.

This guide is a practical companion to our Chronic Constipation guide — use it to build a day-to-day eating pattern around the fiber sources with the best track record.

How Much Fiber Do You Need?

- **Adults under 50:** about 25 grams a day for women, 38 grams a day for men.
- **Adults 50 and older:** about 21 grams a day for women, 30 grams a day for men (targets drop slightly with age, largely reflecting lower calorie needs).
- **Most adults fall well short of these targets** — the typical American diet provides only about 10–15 grams a day, roughly half of what's recommended.
- Within your total, aim for at least **5–10 grams of soluble fiber** specifically, since this is the type most consistently linked to improved stool consistency and frequency.

High-Fiber Foods to Build Meals Around

Approximate fiber content per typical serving — use this as a general guide, since exact values vary by brand and preparation.

Food (typical serving)	Fiber (grams)
• Lentils or split peas, cooked (1 cup)	15–16 g
• Black beans or chickpeas, cooked (1 cup)	13–15 g
• Raspberries (1 cup)	8 g
• Pear, with skin (1 medium)	6 g
• Oat bran or rolled oats, cooked (1 cup)	4–6 g
• Chia seeds or ground flaxseed (2 tbsp)	5–6 g
• Avocado (1/2 fruit)	5 g
• Sweet potato, with skin (1 medium)	4 g
• Broccoli or Brussels sprouts, cooked (1 cup)	4–5 g
• Apple, with skin (1 medium)	4 g
• Whole-wheat bread (2 slices) or brown rice (1 cup)	3–4 g
• Almonds or walnuts (1 oz, about a small handful)	3–4 g
• Popcorn, air-popped (3 cups)	3–4 g

Foods & Fiber Sources With the Best Evidence

Goal: these specific options have been directly tested for constipation, not just fiber content in general — a good place to start.

- **Psyllium** (Metamucil and similar products), mixed into water and taken daily.

Evidence: Psyllium has the most consistent trial evidence among all fiber sources for improving stool frequency and consistency, and is generally considered first-line.

- **Kiwifruit** — 2 green kiwis daily.

Evidence: A randomized trial found kiwifruit worked better than psyllium in the same patients, increasing bowel movements to 6.3 per week versus 4.5 with psyllium. A pooled analysis of several studies confirmed a similar, consistent benefit.

- **Prunes (dried plums)** — about 100 g daily (roughly 8–12 prunes), split into two servings.

Evidence: A randomized trial found prunes outperformed psyllium in the same patients, improving both frequency (3.5 versus 2.8 bowel movements per week) and ease of passage — likely helped by the natural sorbitol prunes contain in addition to fiber.

- **Partially hydrolyzed guar gum (PHGG, sold as Sunfiber)** — a soluble fiber supplement, usually 5–6 g daily, often better tolerated than other supplements.

Evidence: A randomized trial found significantly more people improved on PHGG than on a dummy pill (34.2% versus 17.7%). It tends to cause less gas and bloating than some other fiber supplements, making it a reasonable option if psyllium isn't well tolerated.

How to Increase Fiber Without Bloating

- **Go slowly** — increase intake by about 2–3 grams every few days rather than all at once, giving your gut bacteria time to adjust. Adding too much too quickly is the most common reason people give up on a high-fiber diet.
- **Drink enough fluid alongside fiber** — soluble fiber works partly by absorbing water, so increasing fiber without increasing fluid can make constipation worse rather than better.
- **Spread fiber across meals** rather than loading it all into one meal, which tends to cause less gas and bloating.
- **Give it time.** It can take several weeks of consistent intake before bowel habits noticeably improve — don't judge a change after only a few days.

A Few More Practical Tips

- **Whole foods first, supplements second.** Fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains provide fiber alongside water, vitamins, and other nutrients that a supplement alone doesn't replace — use a fiber supplement to fill the gap, not as a substitute for food sources.
- **Keep the skins and seeds on** when possible (apples, pears, potatoes, cucumbers) — a meaningful share of a fruit or vegetable's fiber sits in the skin.
- **Check nutrition labels** for “dietary fiber” per serving when comparing packaged products like bread, cereal, or crackers — look for at least 3 grams per serving to count as a good source, and 5 or more grams to count as an excellent one.
- **Canned and frozen count too.** Canned beans (rinsed to reduce sodium) and frozen fruits and vegetables retain their fiber content and are a convenient, less expensive way to hit your daily target.

When to Contact Our Office

- Increased bloating, gas, or discomfort that doesn't settle after several weeks of gradually increasing fiber
- No improvement in bowel habits after a consistent trial of dietary changes
- Blood in the stool, unintentional weight loss, or new abdominal pain
- Before adding a fiber supplement if you have a history of bowel obstruction, strictures, or difficulty swallowing

This guide supports your personalized plan and isn't a substitute for individualized medical or nutritional advice. Check with your provider before starting, stopping, or combining anything mentioned here.