

# Postoperative Bariatric Surgery Constipation

Constipation is very common after bariatric surgery. After surgery, the use of pain medications and vitamin supplements, decreased fluid intake, higher protein intake and decreased movement may contribute to constipation.



Do not stop vitamins due to constipation.

## IDEAS TO START WITH:

### Hydrating adequately is very important.

Make sure you are staying hydrated with clear fluids. Adequate hydration is consuming 64–80 ounces of clear fluids per day. If you are not able to drink at least 40 ounces of clear fluids in a day, please contact Memorial Wellness Center or your surgeon's office.

### Physical activity is essential for regular bowel movements.

- Activity helps move food through the bowel and decreases the amount of water the body absorbs from the stool.
- Aerobic exercise will increase breathing and heart rate to assist with moving the stool out of the bowel quicker.
- The best time for activity is at least an hour after eating.
  - Activity right after eating will redirect blood flow to the heart and muscles instead of the stomach, which can affect comfort and digestion.
- Aim to walk 10–15 minutes several times per day to maintain regular bowel movements.
- Stretching and yoga can also be helpful to assist movement of stool through the bowel.
- Position in the bathroom during a bowel movement can also help.



After bariatric surgery, some patients do not have a bowel movement for three days. If you are unable to have a bowel movement or find yourself struggling to have a bowel movement, medications can help.

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## Medications to take for constipation postoperatively:

- **Colace (docusate) 100 mg, 1 capsule once to twice a day as needed/or daily.** This medication can be found over the counter. This medication is a stool softener and can be used to help prevent constipation, especially when taking pain medications. This medication is safe to take daily.
- **Milk of magnesia 30–60 mL, once daily as needed.** This medication can be found over the counter. This medication is a laxative and should only be used as needed to treat acute constipation. This medication works best when taken with 8 ounces of sugar-free clear fluids.
  - We recommend using this medication for the first few weeks after surgery only if needed. If you have not had a bowel movement three days after surgery, you can take this medication once daily until you have a bowel movement. If you have taken this medication for two days in a row and have not had a bowel movement, please contact Memorial Wellness Center or your surgeon's office.
- **Miralax 17 grams of powder, once daily as needed.** This medication can be found over the counter. This medication needs to be dissolved in 4–8 ounces of sugar-free clear fluids. This medication is a laxative.
- **Benefiber 2 teaspoons, as needed (up to 3 times daily).** This medication can be found over the counter. Dissolve 2 teaspoons into 4–8 ounces of sugar-free clear fluids. Do not start this medication until you are at least four weeks postoperative. This medication is a plant-based fiber supplement to prevent constipation. This medication is safe to take daily.

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## IF THE ABOVE DOESN'T WORK, TRY THESE:

### Daily probiotic supplement

Choose a probiotic that has 50% or more of its CFUs from Bifidobacterium.

### Change brand or type of iron supplement.

Ask your dietitian for approved forms of iron.