



HSE Mental Health Services

## Roscommon Mental Health

### Nutrition and Dietetics Department

## Constipation Treatment Protocol

### Dietary Advice for a Healthy Bowel

**Healthy bowel habit** – from 3 bowel motions a day to 3 bowel motions a week.

Some psychotropic medications and reduced physical activity during acute illness can increase the risk of constipation.

#### 1. Eat lots of high fibre foods

Adults need 25g of fibre every day. We need to eat plenty of both soluble and insoluble fibre daily to keep our digestive system healthy. Fibre needs to be **gradually increased** to allow the gut to become used to it.

**Soluble fibre** – Keeps you feeling fuller for longer and adds form to your stool. This type of fibre is found mainly in oats, barley, fruit and pulses (beans, peas and lentils).

**Insoluble fibre** – speeds up digestion and encourages bowel movement. Insoluble fibre is found in wholegrain bread, cereals and pasta, brown rice and the skins of fruit and vegetables.

**Increasing fibre intake:**

- Choose porridge or a wholegrain breakfast cereal (e.g. Weetabix, Shredded Wheat) in the morning.
- ***Increase fruit and vegetables at meals and snacks:***
  - Have fruit as a mid-morning or afternoon snack.
  - Add fruit to breakfast cereals, salads, curries, stews, and smoothies – it adds a lovely natural sweetness.
  - Base desserts on fresh or tinned fruit (tinned in own juice), and add yoghurt.
  - Take a large serving of salad or vegetables, or vegetable soup at lunch and dinner.
  - Include vegetables, salad or fruit at each meal – aim for half of the plate.
  - Taking a small glass of prune juice (~150ml) daily can help constipation.
- Select high fibre crackers, nuts, or fruit salad as a mid-afternoon snack.
- Choose wholemeal bread, rice and pasta instead of white varieties.
- Add legumes, seeds and nuts to breakfast cereals, yoghurt, homemade bread and salads. All kinds of seeds are high in fibre. Sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds and linseeds are all good. You can try them whole or milled. Aim to get 2 tablespoons of seeds everyday.

## 2. Keep hydrated

- It is important to drink more fluids when increasing fibre to avoid discomfort and bloating. Drinking enough fluid is important as it adds weight to the stool, making bowel movements softer and easier to pass.
- Drink 8 to 10 cups (1.5 to 2 litres) of fluids every day (more while exercising or in hot weather).
- Check the urine concentration to assess for dehydration. If it is not pale yellow in colour, more fluid is required.
- Water is the best option; to give it flavour add a slice of lemon or lime or sugar-free squash. Other options are low-fat milk and diluted fruit juice.
- Tea, coffee and many fizzy drinks contain caffeine which acts as a diuretic, and these should be limited.

## 3. Have a regular meal pattern

- The more regular our eating pattern, the more predictable our bowel habit will be. Aim to establish a regular meal pattern including lots of high fibre options to keep food moving through your digestive system and to keep you feeling well.

## 4. Include breakfast every day

- Breakfast provides a great opportunity to include lots of fibre from cereals, fruit, and bread and other breakfast items – but only if we choose the **HIGH FIBRE** starchy food options (e.g. brown/wholemeal/wholegrain/granar

y bread), instead of the low fibre white varieties.

## **5. Relax when eating**

- Take time to sit and enjoy meals.
- Rushing your meals can cause gulping extra air, resulting in feeling bloated and uncomfortable.
- Chew food well to kick-start the digestive process.
- Take time to relax every day as stress can negatively affect your digestive health.

## **6. Daily physical activity**

- Physical activity stimulates the muscles in the bowel to contract, helping to promote a regular bowel habit.
- Regular activity also promotes mental and physical health by relieving stress and reducing the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.
- Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate activity 5 days per week. Moderate activity is where breathing and heart rate are raised but you are still able to hold a conversation (e.g. brisk walking).
- Any amount of exercise is better for mental and physical health than none at all, and as much exercise as possible should be encouraged while on the Mental Health unit (if appropriate to the clients stage of treatment).