

## Patient Information

### St. Paul's Hospital and Mount St. Joseph's Hospital Continence Clinic

#### Dealing with Diarrhea and/or Bowel Incontinence

Many people are bothered from time to time with soft or loose stools. These stools are hard to keep inside the bowel. Loose stools may cause you to rush or lose control of the bowel. They may cause you to go more often to have a **bowel movement** (BM) since only a small amount is passed each time. This can be an embarrassing problem to have. Many people feel they must stay close to the bathroom at home for fear of losing control of their bowel when they go out.

**Do you have a bowel infection?** See your doctor if you suspect you have a bowel infection or if there is blood in your stool. If you have been taking an antibiotic for an infection your stools may become looser. There are some foods or supplements which might help restore the balance.

**Is it something in your diet?** Some people have trouble with milk or dairy products. For them, eating dairy products causes gas, bloating, cramping and diarrhea. Others may have trouble with spicy or greasy foods, cured meats, caffeine, alcohol and artificial sweeteners. Overuse of laxatives can cause loose stools.

**Are you actually constipated?** Loose stool passes around a stool which is too hard and large to pass easily. Unfortunately, some people think the oozing is diarrhea. If they take medications to prevent diarrhea, they may make the constipation worse. Constipation and other problems which may lead to loose or oozing stools can be assessed by your doctor or the nurse continence advisor. Once the cause of the problem is clear a plan to solve it can be found.

**If you answered 'No' to the above then try water-soluble fiber.** A stool which is formed but not hard or too large around is easier to hold and passes easily without straining. This gives you more control.

#### When using water-soluble fiber:

- Make sure you are drinking at least 6 to 8 cups of water per day
- Keep a bowel diary to record the number and consistency of your bowel movements and how much fiber you take each day

You want to know how much water-soluble fiber is right for you. Usually, if you have constipation, a small amount of water-soluble fiber in your diet can soften the stool a bit to make it easier to pass. For diarrhea, more water-soluble fiber is needed to make it less watery.



**Constipation:** 1 to 3 **teaspoons** (small spoons) of water-soluble fiber/day  
**Diarrhea:** 1 to 4 **Tablespoons** (cereal spoons) of water-soluble fiber daily

The best way is to start with the smallest amount recommended and then gradually build up to the right amount. **Start low and go slow.** If loose stools become too hard then decreased the amount of water-soluble fiber you use.

Some examples of water-soluble fiber supplements include: Metamucil (available in powder or capsules, orange flavored and Metamucil for diabetics) and Benefiber (easy to mix and tasteless and comes in powder or chewables). You can find these at your pharmacy.

Fill out the following bowel diary and add be sure to record bowel consistency and amount of water-soluble fiber used.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Number of Bowel Movements							
Consistency (Loose, Soft, Normal or Hard)							
Amount of Water Soluble Fiber taken							

After the first week you can make up your own table. Eventually, you will find the right amount to take. A good goal is to have a soft formed, easy to pass BM every 1 to 2 days.