



## FOOD MATTERS

with Consultant Nutritionist Sue Radd

# NATURE'S LAXATIVES

Chronic constipation can cause a lot of discomfort. An even greater concern is the elevated risk of colon cancer.

### what is constipation?

You're constipated if you have hard stools, infrequent bowel movements, or consistent difficulty in fully evacuating your bowels. Up to 30 percent of people struggle with this condition. Speaking technically, if you have fewer than three bowel movements each week, you are constipated.

A number of conditions can contribute to constipation, including irritable bowel syndrome and certain medications. Also, constipation is more common if you're older, female, or depressed. The most frequent culprit, however, is to be found in what you eat and in your lifestyle. And, fortunately, this is entirely under your control.

### what you can do

- ▶ **Fiber.** This comes only in unrefined plant foods. The key is to keep food traveling through your intestines at a normal rate, and that's exactly what fiber does.
- ▶ **Fluid.** Fiber can't do its job unless it has plenty of water, which softens stools.
- ▶ **Exercise.** Simply walking will stimulate your bowels, helping to keep things in motion. Have you ever noticed how your bowels are slug-

gish when you're bedbound?

- ▶ **Regular bathroom habits.** Don't postpone going to the bathroom when nature calls. And keep in mind that bowel movements tend to be maximal after a meal.

### foods to keep you moving

- ▶ **Legumes.** Whether they are in dal or a bean burrito, dried beans that have been cooked are loaded with fiber, which will get you "going."
- ▶ **Whole-grain breads.** Eat these daily, instead of white varieties. A study in Finland showed that rye bread—think pumpernickel—was even better than laxatives for the relief of constipation.
- ▶ **Flaxseed.** Small and powerful, use a spoonful daily on cereal or mixed in yogurt. You can also try chia seeds.
- ▶ **Dried plums and prune juice.** This is a traditional remedy. "Medicated prunes" have been prescribed since the 1800s. Their high-fiber content and other natural active ingredients work wonders.
- ▶ **Psyllium husks.** Mix them into smoothies, use them to thicken sauces, or simply add them to a glass of water and drink immediately.

Nutritionist Sue Radd is the award-winning author of *The Breakfast Book* and coauthor of *Eat To Live*, internationally acclaimed for showing how savvy eating can combat cancer and heart disease and improve well-being. See [www.sueradd.com](http://www.sueradd.com) for more nutrition information.