

Medicines to Treat Constipation: Laxatives

What are laxatives used for?

Laxatives are medicines used to treat constipation. Having constipation means that you have a bowel movement fewer than 3 times a week. The bowel movements, also called stool, are usually hard, dry, and small. Constipation is a very common problem for older adults. Laxatives may help you have more bowel movements. They may soften the stool so that you are more comfortable when you have a bowel movement.

Constipation that is not caused by a medical problem may also be treated by:

- Drinking plenty of water
- Eating fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains
- Exercising regularly

How do they work?

There are 3 main types of laxatives:

- **Bulk laxatives**, such as fiber supplements, pull water into your bowel movements. The extra water makes your bowel movements larger, softer, and easier to pass.
- **Lubricant laxatives**, such as mineral oil, keep moisture in the bowels, which makes the stool softer and easier to pass.
- **Stimulant laxatives**, such as milk of magnesia and some other laxatives, help the bowel muscles push the stool through the bowel.

What else do I need to know about this medicine?

- Follow the directions that come with your medicine, including information about food or alcohol. Make sure you know how and when to take your medicine. Do not take more or less than you are supposed to take.
- Many medicines have side effects. A side effect is a symptom or problem that is caused by the medicine. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist what side effects the medicine may cause and what you should do if you have side effects.
- Try to get all of your prescriptions filled at the same place. Your pharmacist can help make sure that all of your medicines are safe to take together.
- Keep a list of your medicines with you. List all of the prescription medicines, nonprescription medicines, supplements, natural remedies, and vitamins that you take. Tell all healthcare providers who treat you about all of the products you are taking.

If you have any questions, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for more information. Be sure to keep all appointments for provider visits or tests.

Developed by RelayHealth.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.