

Constipation

Key Points

- Accidental or intentional gluten exposure is one of the main causes of constipation in people with celiac disease.
 - The typical gluten-free diet is low in fiber, so increasing the fiber intake first through foods, and second through supplements, can be beneficial.
 - Do not hesitate to talk to your doctor or dietitian about your concerns.
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How do you define constipation?

- There is not a “strict” definition for constipation, but it is generally recognized with at least one of the following symptoms:¹
 - Fewer than three bowel movements a week
 - Stools that are hard, dry, or lumpy
 - Stools that are difficult or painful to pass
 - A feeling that not all stool has passed
- Talk to your doctor if you have any of the previously mentioned symptoms or other concerns about stooling.

Accidental exposure to gluten

- A common symptom of **gluten exposure** in those with celiac disease is constipation.
- If you do not typically experience constipation and begin to notice it, take a closer look at your diet for gluten exposure.
- Questions to ask are:
 - Have you added a **new food**?
 - Should you re-read the labels on any foods?
 - Have you checked your medications and supplements?
 - Did you examine your kitchen for potential cross-contact?
 - Have you considered how safe the restaurants are where you dine?

Increasing fiber through food

- The typical **gluten-free diet is low in fiber**. Gradually introducing fiber, along with adequate fluid, is recommended as the first treatment for constipation.

- Dietary fiber is found in foods that come from **plants** such as fruits, vegetables, beans and legumes, nuts and seeds, and gluten-free whole grains.
- The recommended daily fiber goal for adults is at least **25 grams for women** and **38 grams for men** (14 grams for every 1,000 calories eaten).²
- Dietary fiber comes in two forms: soluble and insoluble fiber.³
 - **Soluble fiber** dissolves in water within the gut to become a smooth, slimy gel that passes through the gastrointestinal tract. This can slow digestion and help you feel full. Diet sources include beans, peas, avocados, chia seeds, fruits, and carrots, among others.
 - **Insoluble fiber** absorbs water but retains its rough texture, which scrapes old cells off the intestinal lining as it moves through. This adds bulk to your stool and helps move contents through your GI tract. Food examples include leafy greens, potatoes, and nuts.
- It is important to drink enough liquids when increasing fiber in your diet. Water ensures that while stool is bulkier from fiber, it is still soft enough to easily pass.⁴
- Not all fiber is created equally. Fiber from the food sources previously mentioned should be prioritized over supplements or processed foods that have fiber added into them.

Resources for gluten-free high fiber foods and recipes

- [Fiber and the Gluten-Free Lifestyle](#)⁵
 - Includes information on other benefits of fiber, gluten-free whole grain sources, list of high fiber foods and grams of fiber per portion
- [EatingWell High-Fiber Gluten Free Recipes](#)⁶
- [Mayo Clinic High Fiber Recipes](#)⁷
 - Includes recipes for high-fiber appetizers, smoothies, desserts, main dishes, sides, soups, etc. **Not all are gluten-free**, but many can be modified to be gluten-free easily and there is a breakdown of the grams of fat, carbohydrates, protein, and fiber for every serving at the bottom of the recipe.
- Our favorite tips to increase fiber on the gluten-free diet:
 - Cook half of a portion of rice or oats and add half a portion of quinoa, amaranth, or millet. Make sure the grains are labeled gluten-free and that enough water is added.
 - Add beans to soups, salads, or casseroles
 - Snack on fresh or frozen fruits, nuts, vegetables, or popcorn

Supplementing with fiber

- If you cannot get all the fiber you need from your diet, talk to your doctor or dietitian about adding a gluten-free fiber **supplement**.

The following lists fiber supplements that are gluten-free as of July 2025:

Supplement Name	Form	Grams of fiber/serving
Nature's Way Alive! Liquid Fiber	Liquid	5g of soluble fiber per tbsp
Citrucel	Powders Caplets	2g of soluble fiber per 1 scoop 1g of soluble fiber per two caplets

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Fiber Choice	Gummies Chewable tablets Liquid	3g of soluble fiber per 2 gummies 4g of soluble fiber per 2 tablets 3 grams per 1.5 tsp
Heather's Tummy Fiber	Powder	2 g soluble fiber per tsp
Konsyl	Powder Capsules	3g soluble fiber per 6g scoop 1g soluble and 0.3g insoluble fiber per 3 capsules
Metamucil	Powder Capsules	2g soluble fiber and 1g insoluble fiber per 1 tsp 2g soluble fiber per 5 capsules
Nutrisource Fiber	Powder	3g soluble fiber per 1 tbsp
Regular Girl	Powder	5g of soluble fiber per 6g packet

[Please see the BIDMC Disclaimer regarding brand names mentioned on this site.](#)

Other areas to consider if you are constipated:

- Modest **physical activity**, such as daily walks, may help you overcome mild constipation, although it is not likely to help improve severe constipation.⁸
- Some **medications and supplements** can have constipation as a side effect including:¹
 - Opioids
 - Diuretics
 - Drugs to treat Parkinson's
 - Blood pressure medications (calcium channel blockers)
 - Antacids that contain aluminum and calcium
 - Antispasmodics
 - Antidepressants
 - Anticonvulsants
 - Iron or calcium supplements
- Constipation can be a **sign of another medical disorder** such as thyroid disease, diabetes, neurological disorders, structural abnormalities, or intestinal motility disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome.⁴
- **Changes in lifestyle** or routine, such as a new diet pattern, traveling, pregnancy or aging.⁹
- **Food intolerances**, such as lactose intolerance,¹⁰ or malabsorption of other fermentable carbohydrates.

This list is not comprehensive, and any concerns should be addressed with your doctor.

Take Home Messages:

- To help with constipation, increase dietary fiber gradually until you see an improvement in your stooling. Drink at least 6-8 glasses of fluids throughout the day to and engage in regular physical activity.

- Eat fruits, vegetables, beans and legumes, and nuts and seeds to increase fiber. Gluten-free whole grains and high fiber gluten-free flours can also be good sources.
 - If your constipation does not resolve with simple dietary changes, speak to your doctor about starting a fiber supplement, medication to treat the constipation, or to explore other possible causes.
 - Not everyone's body can tolerate moderate or high-fiber diets. Speak to your doctor if you feel like this is you.
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