

## Bowel Leakage Nutrition Guidelines

Bowel leakage (fecal incontinence) happens stool (feces) leak through the anus. It may happen with a small amount of stool, such as when passing gas, or with a full bowel movement. Some people feel an urge to use the bathroom before they have a bowel leakage, while other people may not even feel it happen.

Bowel leakage can have many causes, including diarrhea, constipation, and muscle changes and nerve problems of the rectum. Changing your diet may help.

### Why Nutrition Is Important with Bowel Leakage

Food and habits affect the form of stool and how it moves through your body. Some foods and habits can help make stool more formed while others can make them loose.

### Nutrition Guidelines

1. **Eat more fiber.** Fiber is the part of plant food that stays in your gut after you eat it, which is why it affects your stool. More fiber will add bulk to your stool and may help to make it firmer.

Gender	Age (years)	Recommended Intake in grams (g)
Women	19-50	25
	50+	21
Men	19-50	38
	50+	30

Try to eat more fiber from whole foods. It is best to slowly increase fiber in your diet.

Food	Fiber (grams)
Pear, medium, unpeeled	5.5
Apple, large, unpeeled	5.4
Avocado, ½ cup cubed	5.0
Dates, 3 dried	4.8
Raspberry or Blueberry ½ cup	4.0
Banana, 8-3/4" long	3.5
Brown rice, ½ cup cooked	1.8
Beans and lentils, ½ cup	6-9
Potato with skin, large	5
Squash, butternut or Acorn ½ cup	3-4
Broccoli, cooked	2.6
Carrot, 1 large	2.0
Oatmeal, ½ cup cooked	2.0
Almonds, 1 oz or 23 kernels	3.5

2. **Take fiber supplements.** If you cannot eat enough fiber from food or it is not helping your bowel movements, you may want to try a fiber supplement. Fiber supplements that contain psyllium fiber have been shown to help bowel leakage. Psyllium is a plant with seeds that are ground into a powder. Psyllium encourages normal stools and works for both constipation and diarrhea type stools. Psyllium is the key ingredient in Metamucil<sup>®</sup>, but can be found in other fiber supplements too.

**How to use:** Start with 1 teaspoon of psyllium per day, for about 5 days. Then increase to 2 teaspoons per day for the next 5 days. Finally, increase to 3 teaspoons per day (this equals a tablespoon). Notice how your stool reacts to this amount. You can increase as needed. It is important to do so slowly with enough fluids.

3. **Drink plenty of fluids.** Aim for about 6 to 8 eight-ounce cups (or as recommended by your dietitian) of non-caffeinated fluids. Examples are water, sports drinks, broth, and decaf tea/coffee. Eating more fiber will draw water from your body into your stool, which allows the bowels to move better. If you do not have enough water in your body, your stools may become dry and difficult to move. It is very important to drink extra fluids if you have diarrhea because you may become dehydrated from losing water in your stool.
4. **Limit or avoid food triggers.** Food triggers are different from one person to the next. Research has not proven that these foods cause bowel leakage, but some patients feel they are triggers. If you have already increased fiber without feeling better, try taking out a common trigger for two weeks and see if it helps.

Triggers may include:

- Caffeine
  - Sugar substitutes (aka Splenda<sup>®</sup>, Equate<sup>®</sup>, Sweet and Low<sup>®</sup>)
  - Spicy foods
  - Alcohol
  - High fat, greasy foods
  - Lactose – if you feel this is a problem, take lactase enzymes like Lactaid<sup>®</sup>
  - High FODMAP foods (talk to your dietitian before starting an elimination diet)
5. **Keep a food log.** Write down what you eat, how much, and what symptoms you have. Over time, this may help you find possible trigger foods. You can request a food log from your dietitian.

#### **Who to Call**

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions, please contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below. You can also visit our website at [www.uwhealth.org/nutrition](http://www.uwhealth.org/nutrition).

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children's Hospital (AFCH) can be reached: **(608) 890-5500**.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©12/2023. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#610.