

Constipation in Pregnancy

Constipation is a most common problem that tends to worsen during pregnancy. The main reason that makes constipation a pregnancy problem is that the pregnancy hormones slow the intestinal motility. Additionally, the iron supplements that many patients need also tend to slow down the system.

The following are some steps you may take to minimize the problem:

- Drink plenty of fluids. If not, the material in the intestines will become harder and more difficult for the body to move it.
- Increase the residue on the diet. In other words, eat food with fiber. Think of the intestine as a tooth-paste tube... if there is little paste left, it is difficult to get it out; if the tube is full, it is a lot easier to get the paste out. Consider the following:
 - Eat fresh vegetables and fruit every day.
 - Eat green salad twice daily. This is the crunchy, "rabbit food" type salad. Think lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, celery, among others. These contain a lot of fiber that will stay in the intestine and provide bulk.
 - For breakfast, eat cereals with 5 or more grams of fiber per bowl (for example, shredded wheat or bran flakes).
 - Drink prune juice or eat stewed fruits at breakfast.
 - Include wheat crackers such as "Triscuits™" - by Nabisco, as part of your snacks... Example: place a small square of sandwich cheese on the cracker and microwave for 5-10 seconds.
- Use a fiber product once or twice a day. These products can be purchased as a powder that one dissolves in water, or as a tablet. The best prices can be found in Costco, Sams, and Walmart, among other retailers. Options include: Metamucil, Citrucel, BeneFiber, FiberCon, among others. The fiber stays in the intestine, is not absorbed, and is perfectly safe for the baby.
- Avoid using laxatives or cathartics, which are products that will stimulate the bowel and cause a liquid bowel movement. Cathartics irritate the lining of the intestines.
- Frequent use of laxatives and cathartics habituate the intestine and eventually the system does not work unless one is using the laxative or cathartic in a regular fashion.
- Exercise regularly. For example, walk for 20 minutes every day.
- If the problem is hard stools, Colace (docusate sodium) is a stool softener that can be prescribed by your physician. It does not irritate the bowel mucosa and is not habit forming.