

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

June 10 , 2010

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu**Keeping It Regular**

For some people it's a subject never to be discussed with anyone, not even their doctor. For others it's a constant discomfort that they're desperate to find an answer for. Plus, there are so many myths around it that who knows what to believe? What is IT? Shhh - constipation.

Grandmother probably talked about it in terms of 'regularity'. But that doesn't help us much because some people might only have a bowel movement once every two or three days, very regularly, and be very comfortable. Another person in the family might feel very uncomfortable if they didn't have one or two movements a day! Yet both can be perfectly normal. The medical definition of constipation is the condition of having less than 3 bowel movements in a week, with pain and a lot of pushing, and still feeling uncomfortable.

Constipation does seem to be one of the discomforts that come with growing old. Our elderly folks are more likely to suffer than younger people, but just getting old doesn't cause it. It may partly be due to lack of exercise. One easy remedy is often getting up and taking a walk every day. A lot of medications, one estimate is over 400 different ones, have constipation as a potential side effect. If you've recently had a change in prescriptions and seem to be more constipated, talk to your doctor or pharmacist. There may be other options without that side effect. Some diseases can also cause constipation as a result of the other damage occurring in the body.

There are a lot of myths floating around about what causes constipation. Many people grew up hearing that eating too much cheese would constipate them. Thank goodness, that's not true! One group of residents in a retirement home was given 10 times more than their usual amount of cheese. No one had any problems with constipation as a result. So eat cheese, low-fat please! The calcium will do you good!

Another story out there is that people get constipated because they don't drink enough water. But just drinking more water is not going to prevent or cure it. It might be true if they also started eating a lot more fiber than usual. But most of us don't get enough fiber. If you drink so little that you get dehydrated, then you might become constipated too.

However, eating more fiber along with enough liquid, is a good way to avoid this problem. Fiber acts like a sponge in our intestines. We can't digest fiber, so it keeps going on through. Along the way it absorbs water and gets big and soft and squishy. It is much easier for our intestines to squeeze a big soft sponge in there and keep it moving along. If there's no fiber to catch the water it gets absorbed into the blood, and the lump of food gets very small and stiff. So fiber with water is the important combination.

Most Americans don't eat nearly enough fiber. If our diet is mostly white bread, rice and potatoes along with meat and dairy products, we probably need more fiber. The recommendation is that we should get between 10 and 14 g of fiber for each 1000 calories we eat. That means most of us need 20 to 40 g of fiber a day. Our daily average is closer to 6 or 7 g. No wonder so many people have problems.

There is no fiber in any food that comes from an animal. Meat, fish, poultry and dairy products have not fiber. Not even egg shells count as fiber! Foods that come from plants have fiber, unless it's been taken out of them. White flour and white rice had all the fiber removed, to make them pretty and white. But they're not as healthy as whole grains like brown rice, whole wheat flour, oatmeal or barley. Fruits, veggies and whole grains have fiber. They're what we need more of.

Here's a sweet treat that's also a good source of fiber. You can serve these for breakfast, dessert or just a healthy snack. Enjoy!

Pineapple Coconut Muffins

1 cup all purpose flour	1 Tbsp baking powder
1 cup whole wheat flour	½ cup dry oatmeal
½ cup sugar	½ cup flaked coconut
1 egg	¼ cup oil
1/3 cup milk	1 tsp vanilla extract
1 8-oz can crushed pineapple	¼ cup sliced almonds, optional

Preheat oven to 400° F. Put paper muffin cups into 14 spaces in muffin pans. In large bowl combine flours, oatmeal, sugar, baking powder and coconut. In small bowl mix egg, oil, vanilla and pineapple together. Pour this over the dry ingredients and stir just until the mixture is moistened. Some lumps are okay, and too much stirring will make the muffins tough. Divide the batter into the 14 cups. Each cup should be about 2/3 full. If desired, sprinkle the almonds on top. Bake 20 minutes, until golden brown.

Makes 14 muffins.