



## National MS Society Information Sourcebook

[www.nationalmssociety.org/sourcebook](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/sourcebook)

### **Bowel Dysfunction**

Constipation is a particular concern among people with MS, as is loss of control of the bowels. Diarrhea and other problems of the stomach and bowels can also occur.

Causes of constipation include insufficient fluid intake, reduced physical activity and mobility, and decreased or slowed “motility” (movement of food through the intestinal tract). Certain medications, such as antidepressants or drugs used to control bladder symptoms, may also cause constipation. Loss of bowel control in MS may be neurologic in origin or related to constipation, and should be evaluated by a health care provider (generally a physician or nurse).

Bowel dysfunction can cause a great deal of discomfort and humiliation, and may aggravate other MS symptoms such as spasticity or bladder dysfunction. A health care provider can help establish an effective bowel management program. Occasionally, it may be necessary to consult a gastroenterologist, a physician specializing in the stomach and bowel.

#### **Guidelines for Bowel Regularity**

Bowel regularity can generally be maintained by following a few simple guidelines:

- Drink adequate amounts of fluids, at least 48 oz. or 6-8 glasses of fluid daily.
- Include plenty of fiber in the diet. Fiber can be obtained from fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals, and dietary additives such as powdered psyllium preparations.
- Use stool softeners as recommended by your physician.
- Establish a regular time and schedule for emptying the bowels. Wait no more than two to three days between bowel movements. Enemas, suppositories and laxatives may be used in moderation to facilitate a bowel movement. Continuous or regular use of laxatives is generally not recommended.

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## See also...

### Sourcebook

- Bladder Dysfunction
- Diets

### Society Web Resources

- Spotlight: Personal Care: Bladder & Bowel Problems  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/BladderBowel](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/BladderBowel)
- Medications Used in MS  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/Meds](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Meds)

### Clinical Bulletins for Healthcare Professionals

- Bowel Management in Multiple Sclerosis
- Primary Care in MS  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/ClinicalBulletins](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/ClinicalBulletins)

### Books

Holland NJ, Halper J (eds.). *Multiple Sclerosis: A Self-Care Guide to Wellness* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Demos Medical Publishing, 2005.  
—Ch. 7 Bladder and Bowel Management

Kalb R. (ed.) *Multiple Sclerosis: The Questions You Have; The Answers You Need* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Demos Medical Publishing, 2004.  
—Ch. 4 Nursing Care to Enhance Wellness

Kalb R. (ed.). *Multiple Sclerosis: A Guide for Families* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Demos Medical Publishing, 2005.  
—Ch. 11 General Health and Well-being

Schapiro R. *Managing the Symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Demos Medical Publishing, 2003.  
—Ch. 11 Bowel Symptoms

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society is proud to be a source of information about multiple sclerosis. Our comments are based on professional advice, published experience, and expert opinion, but do not represent individual therapeutic recommendations or prescription. For specific information and advice, consult your personal physician.

To contact your chapter, call **1-800-FIGHT-MS** (1-800-344-4867) or visit the National MS Society web site: [www.nationalmssociety.org](http://www.nationalmssociety.org).