

Magnesium for Constipation

What is magnesium?

Magnesium is a mineral that the body uses to keep the organs functioning, particularly the kidneys, heart, and muscles. Magnesium is found in foods like green vegetables, nuts, and whole grain products.

How can magnesium help with constipation?

While most people are able to keep healthy magnesium levels in their body, some medical conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) can lower your magnesium levels. Magnesium helps to increase the amount of water in your intestines, which can help with bowel movements. You can take doses of magnesium as a laxative or as a supplement for a magnesium deficiency (not having enough magnesium in your body).

How much magnesium should I take?

Magnesium comes in pills of 400 or 500 milligrams (mg). Follow your doctor's directions to take these pills by mouth with a full 8 ounce glass of liquid.

- We recommend taking magnesium pills at night, as these pills can make you sleepy.
- One tablespoon of milk of magnesia is equal to 500 mg of magnesium.
- Do not take more than 1500 mg of magnesium per day.

What are the side effects of taking magnesium?

There can be many side effects from taking magnesium. One of the most common side effects is diarrhea.

Contact your doctor immediately if you have any of the following severe side effects:

- Sleepiness more than normal, where you feel unable to stay awake
- Black or tar-like stools (poop)
- Nausea
- Slow reflexes
- Vomit that looks like coffee grounds

Where can I buy magnesium?

You can find magnesium over-the-counter (without a prescription) at most stores that sell supplements and at pharmacies. It costs around \$12 or more per bottle of 100 pills.

Who shouldn't take magnesium?

Do not take magnesium if you have kidney disease. Since the kidney helps manage the body's magnesium levels, patients with kidney problems may not be able to get rid of the extra magnesium. This can put them at high risk for **hypermagnesemia**, a rare condition where there's too much magnesium in the blood.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by University of Michigan (U-M) Health for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by U-M Health and for which U-M Health does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition, or your treatment plan.

Author: Terri O'Neill, RN BSN
Reviewer: Jenifer Crawford, RN BSN
Edited by: Brittany Batell, MPH MSW CHES®

Patient Education by [U-M Health](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last revised 08/2024