



## Learning More about **Constipation**

**The American colon is blocked. Why? Most of our diets are lacking in fiber and fluid.**

One of the most frequent GI complaints by Americans is constipation. Statistics estimate that over 2.5 million people discuss this with their doctor each year.

**NOTE:** Constipation occurs when your colon absorbs too much water. After your digestive tract absorbs the nutrients, the waste that remains moves to the colon. The colon absorbs the water to create stool. However, when the waste moves too slowly, the stool becomes dry and difficult to eliminate.

**Although the “medical” definition of constipation is fewer than three bowel movements a week – this is not the ideal scenario.**

However, this is one of those situations when “comparison” does not apply. Every individual is different, and some may have several bowel movements a day and others a couple of times a week.

Yet infrequent bowel movements are not healthy. Through proper diet and exercise, we want our patients to strive for 1-3 healthy daily bowel movements.

## **What does healthy mean?**

- Pain-free
- No mucus, blood, or undigested food
- Dark brown
- S-shaped

Even though missing a bowel movement for a couple of days is not dangerous, the longer you go without one, the more difficult it becomes to pass healthy stool. What happens?

- Stools become dry and hard.
- Your bowel movement is painful.
- You are unable to fully empty your bowel.

Other than the symptoms above, other signs are constipation are:

- You have a stomachache or cramps.
- You feel nauseous or bloated.
- Lack of appetite.

If you discover you are often struggling with constipation, several lifestyle choices can help you remedy the problem.

### **These include:**

- Adding more fiber to your diet.
- Drinking more water.
- Getting more exercise (particularly walking after a meal).
- Cutting back on dairy.
- Engaging in stress-relieving activities.
- Keeping a routine as much as possible.

**NOTE:** Often, constipation will occur during traveling due to a change of schedules and “holding in” bowel movements due to lack of access to a toilet.

Additionally, many medications cause constipation.

### **A few of these are:**

- Pain medications
- NSAIDs (Advil, Aleve, etc.)
- Anti-depressants
- Allergy medications
- Iron pills
- Some antacids

Before starting on any of these medications, discuss a protocol with your doctor to prevent constipation.

Certain medical conditions may also lead to constipation.

**For example:**

- IBS
- Diverticulitis
- Endocrine diseases
- Intestinal obstruction
- Colorectal cancer
- Neurologic disorders

**What health problems are a result of constipation?**

- Hemorrhoids
- Anal fissures
- Diverticulitis
- Fecal impaction
- Damage to pelvic floor muscles

**NOTE:** Sluggish bowels may allow bacteria to be reabsorbed and sent back to the liver, which may overload your liver and prevent it from detoxifying other foreign molecules. This could result in fatigue, brain fog, and olfactory sensitivity, to name a few.

If you feel you are constipated, you should discuss your symptoms with your doctor.

**Meanwhile, these lifestyle modifications may offer relief.**

- Drink eight glasses of water each day.
- Include plenty of fiber in your diet. (apples, beans, broccoli, artichokes, Swiss chard, avocado, nuts, oatmeal, whole grains, bran)
- Exercise regularly. A 10–15-minute daily walk is an excellent place to start.
- Always move your bowels when you feel the urge.
- Talk to your doctor about adding magnesium to your supplements.

# CONSTIPATION 🚽

## Reasons



drinking  
insufficient water



unhealthy diet



medicine



pregnancy



stress



a change  
of scenery



age



sedentary  
lifestyle

## Treatment



healthy diet



drink a lot of water



physical activity



massage



medicine

## **How to prepare for your doctor's visit**

If you wish to talk to your doctor about your constipation, prepare for your visit by preparing answers to the following questions.

### **Medical**

- Have you had a colonoscopy, and when?
- What medications are you taking?
- Have you had recent surgeries?
- Is there a family history of GI-issues

### **Lifestyle**

- How often do you exercise?
- How many servings of fruits and vegetables do you eat daily?
- How many hours of sleep do you average per night?

### **Bowel Habits**

- Have you seen blood in your stool? (If you have eaten beets, don't be alarmed at red stool)
- Do you see undigested food in your stool?
- How often do you typically have a bowel movement?
- Do you have mucus in your stool?
- Are your stools hard or soft?

Don't feel embarrassed to discuss this personal topic with your doctor. It is essential to get this detailed information to arrive at a diagnosis.

After assessing your answers and a physical exam, your doctor may want to order some tests.

### **These may include the following:**

- Lab tests – blood and urine
- Imaging tests
- Colonoscopy
- Colorectal transit study

## Additional Actions to Relieve Constipation

- Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Try aloe capsules or juice.
- Raise your feet or try a "Squatty Potty."
- Try OTC fiber

If you opt for a laxative, do not use it for more than two weeks without calling your doctor. Overuse can worsen your condition.

