

MANAGING YOUR CONSTIPATION



Constipation is having bowel movements less frequently than usual. There is no one normal number of bowel movements per week for everyone.

There are many causes, including not enough fluid and fiber intake, stress, inactivity, age, and pregnancy.

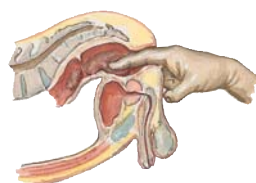


Hard stool



Blood in stool

Symptoms include straining to move bowels, dry or hard stools, bloating of the abdomen (belly), and pain or bleeding from the rectum.



Digital rectal exam

Your doctor makes a diagnosis from your medical history, physical examination (especially of the abdomen), and maybe a digital rectal examination and other tests.

What Is Constipation?

Constipation is having bowel movements less frequently than usual. There is no normal number of bowel movements per week for everyone. Some people move their bowels three times daily and others do it once every 3 days. What is more important as far as colon cancer is if there is a change in bowel movement, frequency, and consistency of the stool.

What Causes Constipation?

Constipation is due to slow movement of stools (feces) through the colon. The many causes include benign conditions, such as not enough fluid and fiber intake, inactivity, pregnancy, recent travel, and stress, to more serious conditions, such as bowel obstruction because of colon cancer. Constipation is usually harmless and due to lifestyle changes. Medicines such as pain relievers containing narcotics, antihistamines, and some antidepressants are other common causes.

What Are the Symptoms of Constipation?

Symptoms include straining to move bowels, dry or hard stools, bloating of the abdomen (belly), pain or bleeding from the rectum during or after a bowel movement, and feeling that the bowel movement wasn't enough, with a need to go again.

How Is Constipation Diagnosed?

The doctor makes a diagnosis from the medical history, including recent lifestyle changes (stress, travel, fluid intake) and medicines. The doctor will also do a physical examination, especially of the abdomen. The doctor may also do a digital rectal examination to check for problems such as hemorrhoids and rectal fissures, to look for stool in the rectum and its consistency, and to test for blood in the stool.

If the stool contains blood, a colonoscopy and blood tests may be done. In a colonoscopy, a specialist uses a small tube attached to a lighted instrument to look at the colon. Blood tests will check for anemia (low blood).

If a lump or mass in the abdomen is found, additional tests such as computed tomography of the abdomen and pelvis may be needed.



Treatment of mild constipation involves lifestyle changes, such as increased exercise.

Include lots of fiber in your diet, such as with fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.



Drink enough fluids (six to eight glasses daily).



Don't use laxatives on a daily basis.



Don't ignore continuing constipation—talk to your doctor. It could be a sign of something serious.

How Is Constipation Treated?

Treatment of mild constipation involves lifestyle changes, with increased exercise and intake of fluids (six to eight glasses daily) and fiber. Laxatives are best avoided because people can become dependent on them. If needed, use natural laxatives such as prune juice. Set a regular time each day for bowel movements. Take enough time, and don't rush. Hot water or coffee a few minutes before may help stimulate the movement.

For moderate to severe constipation, stool softeners, over-the-counter laxatives, and enemas may be needed. Avoid harsh laxatives.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Constipation:

- ✓ **DO** tell your doctor about laxatives you use regularly.
- ✓ **DO** include lots of fiber in your diet, such as with fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- ✓ **DO** drink enough fluids, especially in warm weather.
- ✓ **DO** avoid over-the-counter products such as antihistamines that may cause constipation.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if constipation lasts even with lifestyle changes.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have rectal pain or bleeding with your bowel movements.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have a fever or abdominal pain.
- ⊗ **DON'T** use laxatives daily.
- ⊗ **DON'T** rush your bowel movements.
- ⊗ **DON'T** ignore continuing constipation. It could be a sign of something serious.

FROM THE DESK OF

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following source:

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