

Why Am I Constipated?



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Constipation

What is Constipation?

Constipation (con-stuh-PAY-shun) means that a person has three bowel movements or fewer in a week. The stool is hard and dry. Sometimes it is painful to pass. You may feel "draggy" and full.

Some people think they should have a bowel movement every day. That is not really true. There is no "right" number of bowel movements. Each person's body finds its own normal number of bowel movements. It depends on the food you eat, how much you exercise, and other things.

At one time or another almost everyone gets constipated (CON-stuh-pay-ted). In most cases, it lasts for a short time and is not serious. When you understand what causes constipation, you can take steps to prevent it.

What Can I Do?

Changing what you eat and drink and how much you exercise will help relieve and prevent constipation. Here are some steps you can take.



1. Eat more fiber.

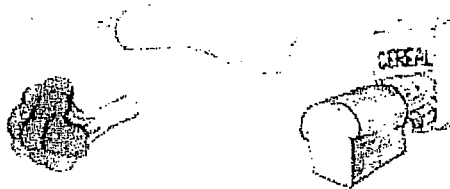
Fiber helps form soft, bulky stool. It is found in many vegetables, fruits, and grains. Be sure to add fiber a little at a time, so your

body gets used to it slowly. Limit foods that have little or no fiber such as ice cream, cheese, meat, snacks like chips and pizza, and processed foods such as instant mashed potatoes or already-prepared frozen dinners. The following chart shows you some high-fiber foods.



High-Fiber Foods

Fruit	Vegetables	Breads, Cereals, and Beans
Apples	Acorn squash	Black-eyed peas
Peaches	Broccoli, raw	Kidney beans
Raspberries	Brussels sprouts	Lima beans
Tangerines	Cabbage	Whole-grain cereal, cold (All-Bran, Total, Bran Flakes)
	Carrots, raw	Whole-grain cereal, hot (oatmeal, Wheatena)
	Cauliflower, raw	Whole-wheat or 7-grain bread
	Spinach	
	Zucchini	



2. Drink plenty of water and other liquids such as fruit and vegetable juices and clear soup.

Liquid helps keep the stool soft and easy to pass, so it's important to drink enough fluids. Try not to drink liquids with caffeine or alcohol in them. Caffeine and alcohol tend to dry out your system.

3. Get enough exercise.

Doctors are not sure why, but regular exercise helps your system stay active and healthy. You don't need to become a great athlete. A 20- to 30-minute walk every day will do the trick.



4. Allow yourself enough time to have a bowel movement.

Sometimes we feel so hurried that we don't pay attention to our bodies' needs. Make sure you don't ignore the urge to have a bowel movement.

5. Use laxatives only if a doctor says you should.

Laxatives (LAHK-sa-tivz) are medicines that will make you pass a stool. Most people who are mildly constipated do not need laxatives. However, if you are doing all the right things and you are still constipated, your doctor may recommend laxatives for a limited time.

Your doctor will tell you if you need a laxative and what type is best. Laxatives come in many forms: liquid, chewing gum, pills, and powder that you mix with water, for example.

6. Check with your doctor about medicines you may be taking.

Some medicines may cause constipation. They include calcium pills, pain pills with codeine in them, some antacids, iron pills, diuretics (water pills), and medicines for depression. If you take medicine for another problem, be sure to ask your doctor about it.

Remember

1. Constipation affects almost everyone at one time or another.
2. Many people think they are constipated when really they are not.
3. In most cases, following these simple tips will help:

- Eat a variety of foods. Eat a lot of beans, bran, whole grains, fresh fruits, and vegetables.
 - Drink plenty of liquids.
 - Exercise regularly.
 - Do not ignore the urge to have a bowel movement.
 - Understand that normal bowel habits are different for everyone.
 - If your bowel habits change, check with your doctor.
4. Most people with mild constipation do not need laxatives. However, doctors may recommend laxatives for a limited time for people with chronic constipation.
 5. Medicines you may be taking for another problem can cause constipation.

Additional Resources

International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders

P.O. Box 1786
Milwaukee, WI 53217
(414) 964-1799

Intestinal Disease Foundation

1323 Forbes Avenue, Suite 200
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
(412) 261-5888

National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse

2 Information Way
Bethesda, MD 20892-3570
E-mail: National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse

The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC) is a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). NIDDK is part of the National Institutes of Health under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Established in 1980, the clearinghouse

provides information about digestive diseases to people with digestive disorders and to their families, health care professionals, and the public. NDDIC answers inquiries; develops, reviews, and distributes publications; and works closely with professional and patient organizations and Government agencies to coordinate resources about digestive diseases.

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