

Constipation

What is Constipation

Constipation is infrequent bowel movements or difficult passage of stool that persists for several weeks or longer. It is generally described as having fewer than three bowel movements in a week.

Causes (or Common Causes)

Constipation can be caused by many factors including medications, physical inactivity, diets that have high amounts of baked goods or fatty foods (i.e. French fries, chips, etc.) and/or diets that do not have enough fruits and vegetables.

Side Effects

People may experience any of the following side effects of constipation:

- Colon Cancer
- Diverticulitis- Bulging pouches in the digestive tract that can become inflamed or infected causing fever and abdominal pain.
- Fecal impaction- This happens due to hard stool being stuck in the large intestine. Regular pushing will not be able to remove the stool. Bloating, cramping, nausea and vomiting may be present. Seek medical attention if you experience increased abdominal pain, hard stool, fever of 100.4 or higher, and/or chills.
- Hemorrhoids
- Pain/discomfort
- Rectal bleeding

Treatment of Constipation

Constipation can be treated in a variety of ways by making changes to one's lifestyle. One way to do this is by establishing a schedule for attempting a bowel movement. For example, attempting a bowel movement twice a day, once within two hours of waking and/or 30 minutes after eating, straining for no more than five minutes while attempting.

Other strategies include going to the bathroom as soon as the urge arises and not attempting to hold it in, taking a warm bath to relax, and increasing the amount of exercise you get. Exercise can include things like running and lifting weights and can also include low-impact activities like walking, gardening, or cleaning.

The foods we eat can also help with relieving constipation. Eating at least 20-25 grams of fiber every day is recommended. Fiber is found in fruits and uncooked vegetables as well as whole grain breads and oatmeal's. Foods that are high in sugar, fat, and starch should be eaten in moderation; this includes food items like french fries, chips, and other processed goods. Drinking at least 8 glasses of water a day can also improve constipation, as well as limiting drinks with sugar or caffeine.

At times, laxatives are used for relief of symptoms of constipation. This should be individualized based on each person's medical history as there are numerous types of laxatives. Please consult a medical professional for additional information.

- Bulk forming
- Osmotic (Medication brings more water into the bowel)
- Stimulants
- Stool softeners
- Suppositories
- Enemas

Monitoring of Symptoms (not sure if we want this at the end or fits better somewhere else?)

Use the [Bristol Stool Chart](#) to determine what type of stool you are producing. This can help medical providers get people the proper treatment. Constipation and bowel obstruction can have similar symptoms and can even look like having the flu. Talk to your doctor if you think you may be experiencing constipation or if you have additional questions.