

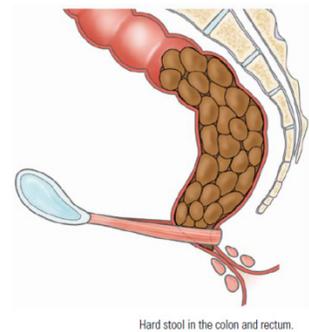
Frequently Asked Questions: Constipation

1. What Is Constipation?

- Constipation is when you have infrequent or hard-to-pass bowel movements (meaning they are painful or you have to strain), have hard stools or feel like your bowel movements are incomplete. **Infrequent means less than three bowel movements a week.**¹
- It is normal to have some constipation at times as a result of what you eat or other habits.¹
- If there is ongoing pain with bowel movements or there is blood in your stool, call your doctor.¹

Bowel Movements: What Is “Normal”?¹

- ✓ You do not need to have a bowel movement every day
- ✓ Each person has a different normal bowel function.
- ✓ The frequency of bowel movements in healthy people varies from three movements a day to three a week.
- ✓ Stools should be passed without too much effort, straining or pain with passage.
- ✓ You must figure out what a normal bowel routine is for you. Try keeping a journal.



2. What symptoms you may feel if you have constipation?

Symptoms of constipation include:²

- reduced frequency of bowel motions (fewer than 3 per week)
- difficulty and straining when passing bowel motions
- passing small, hard, lumpy stools
- a feeling of incomplete evacuation or inability to empty the rectum.

Occasionally

You may also feel bloated or have abdominal pain, some people complaining of diarrhea may in fact have ‘overflow’ diarrhea as a result of constipation.²

3. What can cause constipation?

In most cases, constipation is a symptom, not a disease. Below is a list of some of the most common causes of constipation:

Poor Diet¹

- Not eating enough veggies, fruits and whole grains can make the stools hard and difficult to pass.
- Changes in your diet, like when you travel, along with inactivity can also lead to constipation.

Medications¹

- Many medications can cause constipation.
- Let your doctor know all of the medications you are on, or let your doctor know if you have had constipation in the past before starting a new medication.
- Some examples of medicine that can cause constipation are:
 - Pain medications (mainly narcotics).
 - Some antacids
 - Antispasmodic drugs, which suppress muscle spasms
 - Antidepressant drugs
 - Tranquilizers
 - Iron supplements
 - Anticonvulsants, for epilepsy
 - Anti-Parkinson's disease drugs
 - Calcium channel blockers, for high blood pressure and heart conditions.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)¹

- Also known as IBS with constipation or IBS-C, this condition is one of the most common causes of constipation
- IBS-C is associated with more belly pain than some other causes of constipation.

Poor Bowel Habits¹

- You can start a cycle of constipation by not going when you have the urge to move your bowels (like when you are too busy or don't want to use a public toilet).
- After a while, you may stop feeling the need to go at all. This leads to constipation.

Pelvic Floor Dysfunction¹

- When the muscles in the pelvic floor don't relax as they should to allow easy passage of stool, it causes constipation and the feeling like you have to go, but nothing comes out.
- This is treated by biofeedback and retraining of these muscles through pelvic floor physical therapy.

Other conditions²

Constipation can sometimes be caused by an underlying condition:

- pregnancy;

- depression;
- hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid);
- diabetes;
- neurological conditions (such as Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injuries and stroke).

4. When to contact your Doctor immediately?

You should immediately talk to your doctor about your constipation when: ¹

- Your symptoms last longer than three weeks.
- Your symptoms are really bad or disabling.
- You have bad stomach pain when you pass stool.
- You notice that your stools are consistently thinner.
- You see blood in your stool, particularly if it is mixed with stool or you notice that your rectal bleeding (blood on the toilet paper) does not go away or comes back often. Your stools are black.
- You are found to have anemia (low iron in your blood, which can make you feel weak and tired.)
- Along with other symptoms, you start losing weight without trying to.

When you talk to your doctor, tell him about all medications, even OTC drugs, you are taking, as they could be a cause of constipation.¹

Your doctor will decide if tests are needed to figure out if your constipation is the symptom of an underlying health problem.¹

5. Do you need any tests?²

Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and perform a physical examination. Depending on your history and physical examination findings, they may recommend tests such as:

- blood tests;
- an abdominal X-ray;
- colonoscopy (where a lighted, flexible tube is used to examine the inside of the rectum and large bowel);
- tests to evaluate the function of the lower bowel.

6. How can Constipation be treated?

The first step in treating constipation is to know that normal bowel function varies widely, from three bowel movements a day to three a week. Each person must figure out what is normal for him or herself to notice a change in their normal bowel habits. Above all, know that feeling better takes time and effort.¹

Daily Habits^{1, 3}

Fiber

Depending on your age and sex, adults should get 25 to 31 grams of fiber a day.⁴ Older adults sometimes don't get enough fiber because they may lose interest in food.

Talk with a health care professional, such as a dietitian, to plan meals with the right amount of fiber for you. Be sure to add fiber to your diet a little at a time so your body gets used to the change.

Plenty of water

You should drink water and other liquids, such as naturally sweetened fruit and vegetable juices and clear soups, to help the fiber work better. This change should make your stools softer and easier to pass.

Drinking enough water and other liquids is also a good way to avoid dehydration. Staying hydrated is good for your overall health and can help you avoid getting constipated. Ask a health care professional how much liquid you should drink each day based on your size, health, activity level, and where you live.

Other recommendations:

- Eat a well-balanced diet with whole grains, fresh fruits and veggies
- Exercise regularly
- Set aside time after breakfast or dinner to go to the bathroom
- Go to the bathroom when you feel like you have to. Don't ignore the urge to have a bowel movement

There are a number of treatment options to help treat constipation found over the counter, without a prescription. These options come in many forms, such as pills, powders (to mix with liquid), enemas or suppositories.¹

There are several groups of laxatives that work in different ways (by alphabetical order)

- **Alternative medicine⁶**

Using a probiotic such as bifidobacterium or lactobacillus may be helpful, but more studies are needed. Fructooligosaccharide, a sugar that occurs naturally in many fruits and vegetables, may be helpful as well.

- **Bulking Agents (Fiber)¹**

- Bulking agents, or bulk-forming agents, pull fluid into your intestines, which makes stool bigger or bulkier.
- The bigger stool causes the colon to contract and push it out.
- You must take bulking agents with lots of water, or else they may back up and block your bowel.
- Bulking agents can cause bloating (swelling) and belly pain.

- **Lubricants¹**
Instead of keeping fluid in the stool, lubricants coat the outside of stool, which helps it pass more easily.

- **Osmotic Agents¹**
 - Osmotic agents help stool to keep fluid within it. The more fluid in your stool, the softer it will be, and the more bowel movements you will have.
 - Osmotic agents can cause dehydration (fluid loss) or mineral imbalance, so older adults and people with heart or kidney failure need to be careful with these medications. Talk to a doctor first.
 - Iso-osmotic laxatives cause less of a salt imbalance than the osmotic laxatives
 - Iso-osmotic laxatives are available as powders, which can be dissolved in water⁵

- **Stimulant Laxatives¹**
Stimulant laxatives make the intestines contract and move stool along.

- **Stool Softeners¹**
Stool softeners do not necessarily give you the urge to go, but they help bring fluids into stool, which softens them. - Stool softeners are often recommended to help people not strain while having a bowel movement (such as after a surgery or after childbirth).

Talk with a health-care professional about your options.

Reference list:

1. Patient information on constipation provided by the AGA Institute. Available from: <https://www.gastro.org/practice-guidance/gi-patient-center/topic/constipation>. Last access 20.07.2018
2. Constipation: causes and symptoms. Available from: <http://www.mydr.com.au/gastrointestinal-health/constipation-causes-and-symptoms>. Last access 20.07.2018
3. <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases/constipation/eating-diet-nutrition>. Last access 03.08.2018
4. U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015-2020. 8th ed. Published December 2015. Accessed May 1, 2018.
5. <http://www.mydr.com.au/pharmacy-care/constipation-self-care>. Last access 03.08.2018
6. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/constipation/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20354259> Last access 03.08.2018

About Acino

Acino is a Swiss pharmaceutical company headquartered in Zurich. We deliver quality pharmaceuticals to promote affordable healthcare in the emerging markets. With a proven track record, our dedication to get medication to those who need it most, and with a scientific educational approach, we aim to become the preferred brand for patients and professionals.

When you choose Acino, you are choosing quality you can rely on.

Find out more on our website: www.acino.swiss