



Constipation

What is constipation? Constipation means difficulty in having a bowel movement. It may involve stools that are hard, infrequent and difficult to pass, or feeling like you still need to have a bowel movement even after you've had one. It's common to feel bloated, cramping, and a sense of fullness with constipation. Normally, the range is three bowel movements a day to three times per week.

What causes constipation? As the food you eat passes through your digestive system, your body takes nutrients and water from the food. What is not used is passed along through your intestines by muscle contractions and forms a stool. Many things affect this:

- Not drinking enough fluids
- Low fiber diet
- Certain medications
- Not going to the bathroom when you have the urge to do so
- History of using laxatives regularly
- Too few calories, causing a poorly functioning colon
- Intestinal muscles weakened by an eating disorder

What can I do to prevent constipation?

- Eat plenty of fiber: bran, whole grain foods, fruits and vegetables
- Drink enough fluids
- Walk gently after meals if it is okay with your treatment plan
- DO NOT use stimulant laxatives: laxatives may cause electrolyte imbalances which can lead to weak muscles and kidney problems, cardiac problems, and even death. Eventually, your bowel will have trouble working on its own.

What are safe medications to treat constipation?

- Bulk or fiber agents are safe if you start at a very low dose (1 Tbsp per day), increase dose slowly and drink plenty of fluids
- Osmotic or water adding agents: start with 1 packets or 1 Tbsp daily and increase as needed. You can use both bulk/fiber agents and osmotic agents together

Check with your doctor for further recommendations

- You should check with your doctor if the constipation is new or unusual for you, or if you have pain and/or blood in your stools.