

CONSTIPATION








WHAT IS CONSTIPATION?

Constipation is defined as infrequent (fewer than three) bowel movements a week. Brief periods of constipation are normal. About 80 percent of people will have constipation during their lifetime. Common symptoms include:

- Decrease in amount of stool
- Need to strain/push to have a bowel movement
- Sense of incomplete emptying
- Need for enemas, suppositories and/or laxatives to be regular

WHAT ARE NORMAL BOWEL HABITS?

Everyone is different, but for most people, it is normal to have bowel movements between three times per day to three times per week. Normal stools should be about the size, shape and consistency of a ripe banana, between types 3 and 4 on the Bristol Stool Chart below.

Bristol Stool Chart		
Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
Type 2		Sausage-shaped but lumpy
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on its surface
Type 4		Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
Type 5		Soft blobs with clear cut edges (passed easily)
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, mushy stool
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces. ENTIRELY LIQUID

WHAT CAUSES CONSTIPATION?

Constipation may be the result of several, possibly simultaneous factors including:

- Limited fluid and fiber intake
- Imbalances in the diet (too much sugar and animal fat)
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Repeatedly ignoring the urge to have a bowel movement
- Slow movement of the stool due to too much water absorption in the colon
- Lifestyle changes, such as pregnancy and travel
- Laxative abuse

CAN MEDICATIONS CAUSE CONSTIPATION?

Yes, you can get constipation from medications you are taking for other conditions. Medications that treat bladder urgency, pain, depression and blood pressure, as well as iron and calcium supplements, can cause constipation. Always tell your physician about any changes in bowel habits.

HOW DOES CONSTIPATION AFFECT MY BLADDER?

Constipation is another possible cause of bladder control problems. When the rectum is full of stool, it can disturb the bladder. Chronic constipation and/or straining can lead to excessive stress on pelvic organs and nerves, a condition that also contributes to bladder dysfunction.

HOW IS CONSTIPATION TREATED?

Fiber: Most people in Western society need more fiber in their diet. Fiber supplements take several weeks, possibly months, to reach full effectiveness, but they are not habit-forming as some laxatives can be and can be purchased over the counter. It is important to avoid regular use of laxatives and enemas as they decrease the bowel's ability to function.

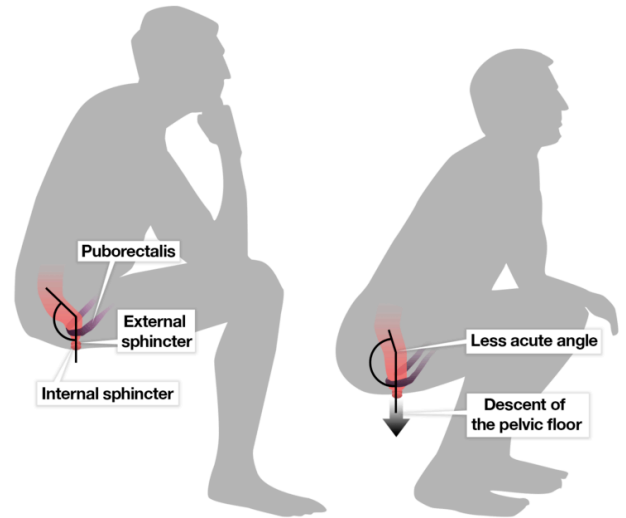
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Foods	Serving size	Grams of fiber
Oat or wheat bran	1 ounce	12
Bran cereal	½ cup	10
Oatmeal (cooked)	1 cup	4
Popped corn	1 cup	2 ½
Whole-grain bread	1 slice	2
Pinto beans	1 cup	15
Baked beans	1 cup	14
Lima beans	1 cup	13
Kidney beans	½ cup	8
Flaxseed	1 ounce	8
Almonds	1 ounce	4
Potato (with skin)	1 med.	5
Green peas	½ cup	4
Broccoli	½ cup	3
Dates	½ cup	6.5
Pears	1 med.	4
Raspberries	½ cup	4
Blueberries	½ cup	4
Apple (with skin)	1 med.	4
Orange	1 med.	4

Follow your urge: Your body has a natural emptying reflex. Approximately ½ hour after eating a meal or drinking a hot beverage, a reflex occurs to increase motility or movement of the stool down to the rectum. This reflex usually occurs in the morning when trying to get yourself or your family ready to get out the door. Try getting up earlier to eat and allow time to take advantage of this reflex.



Diet: Discuss your fiber needs with your physician, pharmacist or nutritionist. Typical dietary recommendations for fiber are between 25 and 35 grams per day. Most Americans consume only 10 to 15 grams per day. When adding fiber to your diet, remember to drink plenty of fluids (at least six cups a day). Add fiber to your diet slowly to avoid abdominal bloating and discomfort as well as gas.

Position on toilet: It can help to properly position yourself on the toilet for maximum relaxation of your pelvic floor muscles. Be sure your feet are supported or use a stool for maximal hip and knee flexion, similar to a squat.

Leaning forward and supporting your elbows on your knees can help. Pay attention to the relaxation of your pelvic floor muscles while emptying your bowels. Be sure to take time to empty your bowels - remember the word “rest” in restroom.

KEY POINTS:

1. Constipation is having less than three bowel movements per week but also might include excessive straining, incompletely emptying and passing hard, lumpy stool.
2. To improve pooping, exercise regularly, drink enough water and be sure to eat a diet high in fiber.
3. Talk about your symptoms with your provider and ask which medicines may help or impact constipation.

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