

# CONSTIPATION

NOLENSVILLE FAMILY MEDICINE  
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## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Having fewer bowel movements than usual and difficulty in passing stools. In most people, constipation is harmless. In some, it can be a sign that something else is wrong with the body. People may think they are constipated when their bowel movements are actually regular. There is no right number of daily or weekly bowel movements. Everyone has different bowel patterns.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Hard, dry, or lumpy stools.
- Having to strain to have a bowel movement.
- Fewer than three bowel movements a week.
- Pain or bleeding with bowel movements.
- Feeling bloated or sluggish.
- Feeling like you still need to go after having a bowel movement.

### CAUSES

The slow movement of feces (stool) through the large intestine. This results in a dry, hard stool.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Constipation can be a symptom or a complication of many different medical disorders.
- Emotional factors such as depression or anxiety.
- Not getting enough fluids.
- Not enough fiber in the diet.
- Being inactive.
- Taking certain drugs.
- Problems with the rectum.
- Laxative abuse.
- Travel-related constipation.
- Advancing age.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Eat a well-balanced diet. Include lots of fiber.
- Exercise regularly.
- Drink at least 8 glasses of fluid a day.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable with exercise, diet, and enough fluids.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Hemorrhoids.
- Becoming dependent on laxatives.
- Uterine or rectal problems.
- Colon problems; blocked bowel.
- Chronic constipation.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Self-care may be all that is needed for treatment. If you have any concerns, see your health care provider. A physical exam may be done and questions asked about your symptoms and activities. Medical tests may be done depending on the severity of the symptoms.
- Treatment will be prescribed for any specific cause.
- In most cases, constipation can be helped with changes in diet and lifestyle (such as more exercise). Laxatives are usually not needed for mild constipation.
- Make a regular time each day for bowel movements. The best time is often within 1 hour after breakfast. Don't try to hurry. Sit at least 10 minutes, even if a bowel movement doesn't occur.
- Drinking hot water, tea, or coffee may make you feel the need to have a bowel movement.
- A person dependent on laxatives should slowly stop using them. Normal bowel function will begin again.

### MEDICATIONS

For occasional constipation, you may use stool softeners, mild nonprescription laxatives, or enemas. Don't use laxatives or enemas regularly, because you can become dependent on them. Avoid harsh laxatives. Ask your pharmacist or health care provider which laxatives are best to use.

### ACTIVITY

Get regular exercise and stay physically fit. This helps stimulate the bowel and can maintain healthy bowels.

### DIET

Drink at least 8 glasses of fluid each day. Eat a high-fiber diet (beans, bran cereals, raw fruits, and vegetables). Avoid refined cereals and breads, pastries, and sugar.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- Constipation persists despite self-care, especially if the constipation is a change in your normal bowel patterns. Changes in bowel patterns may be a sign of cancer.
- You have a fever or severe stomach pain.

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Special notes:

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