



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A large, firm amount of stool that cannot be passed voluntarily. In most cases, the impacted stool is in the rectum, which is the lowest end of the bowels. Sometimes, the impaction may extend further up into the bowels.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Lack of normal bowel movements.
- Sense of fullness in the rectum, but unable to pass stool.
- Pain or cramps in the stomach or abdomen area (often after meals).
- Thin, watery discharge from the rectum.
- Headache, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite.
- General sick feeling.

CAUSES

Irregular bowel function causes dry, hardened feces to remain in the colon or rectum.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Long term constipation.
- Rectal disorders that make normal bowel movements uncomfortable, such as painful hemorrhoids or fissures.
- Rectal or colon cancer.
- Swallowing substance for x-rays of the intestinal tract.
- Nerve problems in the colon or rectum, as with a spinal-cord injury, stroke, Parkinson's disease, or multiple sclerosis.
- Being elderly or bedridden (such as after surgery).
- Disorders such as hypothyroidism or hypercalcemia.
- Use of some drugs, such as narcotic pain remedies.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Increase the fiber in the diet. Drink adequate amounts of fluid each day. Begin a program of regular exercise.
- Set aside a regular time each day for bowel movement (within an hour after breakfast is best). Don't try to hurry. Sit at least 10 minutes.
- If mild constipation develops, use a stool softener or a suppository.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable with treatment. Impaction may recur, unless the underlying cause is removed.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Injury to the rectum.
- If the impaction is not removed, the problem can worsen and surgery may be required.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do an exam of the abdomen area and a digital rectal exam. The rectal exam is done with a gloved finger inserted into the rectum. Medical tests such as x-ray and others may be done to confirm the diagnosis and check for complications.
- The impacted mass may be removed partially by your health care provider. This is done as with the rectal exam. A gloved finger (sometimes two) is inserted into the rectum and the mass is broken up. The rest of the stool may be removed with the use of a suppository. In some cases, water irrigation with a special instrument inserted into the rectum is used.

MEDICATIONS

After treatment, stool softeners may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

No limits. Be as active as your health permits. Good physical fitness improves bowel function.

DIET

- Eat a normal, well-balanced diet that is high in fiber.
- Drink at least 8 glasses of fluid each day.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of a fecal impaction.
- Your normal bowel pattern changes.

Special notes:
