

Constipation

DESCRIPTION

Having fewer bowel movements (BMs) 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. There is no right number of daily or weekly bowel movements. Everybody's bowel habits are different.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

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

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Constipation can be a symptom of other 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.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Eat a well-balanced high fiber diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- Drink at least 8 glasses of water a day.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

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

GENERAL MEASURES

- Self-care may be all that is needed for treatment.
- In most cases, constipation can be helped with changes in diet and exercise. Laxatives

are usually not needed for mild constipation.

- Set a regular time each day for BMs. The best time is often in 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 help make you feel the need to have a BM.
- 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. Ask your pharmacist or health care provider which laxatives are best to use.

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 fever or severe stomach pain.

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