

HOW TO PUT AN END TO CONSTIPATION



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How to put an end to constipation

by

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RESEARCH

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Introduction

Constipation isn't something that people like to discuss. So, conversations surrounding our digestive system—particularly our bowel movements—are usually private, with ourselves. However, constipation is a typical problem that many people experience. Knowing how it's caused and how to prevent and treat it helps make things go much more smoothly (pun intended).

What is constipation? Chronic constipation¹ is deemed as having infrequent bowel movements (fewer than three a week) or having difficulty passing stools over many weeks, possibly longer.



Hopefully, you'll use this information to make your bathroom time much more comfortable.



Here, we'll discuss the common causes of constipation, ways to keep it from happening, and how to get things back on track. Common causes of constipation include:

DIET



STRESS



LACK OF HYDRATION



INACTIVITY



HEALTH CONDITIONS



MEDICATIONS



Common treatments for this issue run the gamut of:



**Eliminating or adding
certain foods**



Upping water intake



Increasing physical activity



**Meditation and stress
-relieving activities**



**Altering medications or
improving other health-related
conditions**

(for which you should always consult a doctor)

Chapter 1

Signs You Might Have Chronic Constipation

As we said, everyone feels constipated now and again. Maybe you indulged too much in the cheese spread at your office holiday party, or perhaps you had an extremely stressful week, and your brain is telling your body that it can't "let go." In fact, over 4 million people just in the United States complain of chronic constipation. This accounts for over 2.5 million doctor's visits each year².

Whatever the cause, your symptoms³ might range from one or two of these to all.



Having three or fewer bowel movements per week



Lumpy stools, hard, or both



Straining when passing stools



Feeling as though something is blocking your bowel movement



Feeling as though there is stool left inside your rectum after you've passed all you could



Needing to press your hands on your belly or insert a finger into your rectum to remove stool



Feeling bloated or uncomfortable throughout the day



Feeling lethargic or sluggish



General abdominal pain or pain when the abdomen is touched

If you've felt two or more of these for three months, then many doctors would consider your condition to be chronic. If this applies to you, you should make an appointment to see your doctor so that you can develop a treatment plan to relieve your chronic constipation.

People Who Are at Risk for Constipation

Certain factors increase your risk for constipation⁴. If you fall into any of the below categories, and especially if you fall into more than one, then this book is even more important.

Female

65 or older

Dehydration

Low-fiber diet

Little to no daily physical activity

Sedatives, opioids, antidepressants, or blood pressure medications

Mental health conditions such as depression or an eating disorder





How a Doctor Diagnoses and Treats Constipation



Your doctor will do further tests⁵ to ensure that what you are experiencing is truly chronic constipation. Depending on the duration and severity of your symptoms, the tests will vary. Your provider will probably ask if you've ever noticed blood in your stool, if your bowel habits have changed, and if you've recently gained or lost a significant amount of weight. They will also consider your age, medical history, and a sample of your stool.

If the initial examination and discussion call for it, your provider might also suggest a more intensive examination. This will usually include a DRE, which stands for a digital rectal examination. Your doctor will use a gloved hand to insert a lubricated finger into your rectum. They will evaluate your muscle tone and look for spots of tenderness, obstructions, blood, and areas where your rectum might be enlarged.



A digital x-ray could also be used, as well as barium enemas, a colonoscopy, a sigmoidoscopy, a colorectal transit study, or anorectal function tests.

01 Digital abdominal x-ray

An x-ray will show if you have impacted stool further into your intestines. If this is the case, your doctor may prescribe a treatment plan for stool softeners and then laxatives to remove the built-up stool.

02 Barium enema

With this process, your rectum and intestines are examined, and then barium is inserted into the rectum. The barium shows up on an x-ray, which can show obstructions, strictures, and other problems.

03 Colonoscopy

With a colonoscopy, your doctor will look at the entire length of your intestine. This can help them see abnormal growths, inflammation, ulcers, or internal bleeding. They will insert a flexible, lighted tube into your rectum and colon to observe the lining, possibly remove tissue, and treat any issues that are discovered.

04 Sigmoidoscopy

This diagnostic procedure helps identify the root cause of many digestive issues, including constipation. The doctor will use a different type of tube (a sigmoidoscope) through your rectum and into your intestine. Then, it will blow air into your intestine to inflate it and make viewing easier.

04 Colorectal transit study

This procedure shows your provider how well food moves through your system. You will swallow small capsules with markers that show up on an x-ray. Then, you'll consume a high-fiber diet, and your provider will mark the progress of the markers over three to seven days.

02 Anorectal function tests

If your doctor has diagnosed an anus or rectum that functions improperly, then they can use these tests to diagnose constipation.

A photograph of a human skeleton sitting on a toilet in a bathroom. The skeleton is dressed in a white bathrobe and has a white towel wrapped around its head like a turban. It is holding a smartphone in its hands. The background shows a shower area with a glass door and a showerhead. The text is overlaid on the lower left of the image.

These tests might not sound enjoyable; however, they are an important part of understanding why the constipation is happening and how to go about treating it. That being said, the treatments described later in this book might be able to take care of the issue before it comes to this.

Chapter 2



No matter the case, constipation is caused by several things, all of which can be handled. Let's first go over the most common causes of constipation.

When you get down to the root of it, all constipation is “caused” by stool moving too slowly through the digestive tract or not being fully eliminated⁷. The colon responds to many situations by absorbing too much water, drying and hardening the stool. Usually, your colon absorbs water while forming waste. Then, your muscles push that stool out of the rectum. By the time the stool is ready to be released, the majority of the water is absorbed. This makes your stool solid.

Causes of Constipation

Constipation wreaks havoc for many people. For some, it occurs now and again, during specific situations, or after particular experiences. For others, it seems their system stalls. When people experience chronic constipation, it can feel like it takes over their lives. Suddenly, simple tasks are more difficult because you feel uncomfortable or you're not sure when you'll be able to go. Those struggling with chronic constipation can also end up with further health conditions⁶, such as hemorrhoids, because of the strain it takes to pass their stool.



However, when bowel muscles are weak and inefficient, stool travels through the colon more slowly. This means that too much water is absorbed, which makes your stools too hard.

Colon or Rectum Blockage

Colon blockages make it harder for stool to pass and exit your body. Colon blockage is caused by things such as:



Anal fissures (small tears in the skin around the anus)



Bowel obstructions (intestinal blockage)



Bowel strictures (narrowed colon)



Tumors (colon cancer)



Abdominal tumors that press on the colon



Tumors (rectal cancer)



Rectocele (when the rectum bulges through the back wall of the vagina)



Impacted stool

Nerve and Muscle Issues

Your colon consists of two sphincters: the internal anal sphincter (IAS) and an external, the ileocecal sphincter (ICS). The inner sphincter is involuntary, while the outer is voluntary, meaning you have control over it. Muscles create peristalsis that supports stool moving through the lumen.

Certain conditions interfere with the nerves surrounding these muscles. These include, but aren't limited to:

Multiple sclerosis

Parkinson's disease

Stroke

Spinal cord injury

Nerve damage surrounding the areas that control bodily functions

Other issues that cause constipation include difficulty with the muscles that are used for passing bowel movements:

Inability to relax the pelvic muscles enough for passing stool (anismus)

Non-coordination of the pelvic muscles used to relax and contract (dyssynergia)

Weak pelvic muscles

Hormonal Conditions

Hormones play a part in everything that happens in our bodies. Thus, hormones can often cause constipation as they balance fluids. When fluids aren't balanced, your stool becomes too hard to pass.

If you have any of these conditions, constipation becomes more likely:

DIABETES



PREGNANCY



HYPOTHYROIDISM (UNDERACTIVE THYROID)



HYPERPARATHYROIDISM (OVERACTIVE THYROID)



Complications of Constipation

Of course, no one enjoys the feeling of being constipated. However, there are other complications⁸ that come with this condition. Even if you're "just uncomfortable" and would rather not talk about it with your medical provider, keeping this information inside puts you at risk for more serious issues. Consider the following and then make an appointment with a medical professional.

01 Hemorrhoids

These are swollen veins inside your anus. Too much straining causes swelling, which ends up being quite painful, and can cause bleeding (mainly when passing stool).

02 Anal fissures

Fissures are small tears caused by large, hard stools coming out of your anus. Anal fissures are a vicious cycle because once they appear, they also make it harder for stool to come out.

03 Impacted fecal matter

Waste that gets backed up in your colon eventually becomes backed up in your intestines. This causes your intestines to swell, which can press on your bladder and other organs.

04 Rectal prolapse

If you strain too hard, eventually, your rectum could stretch so much that it comes out of the anus and has to be pushed back in after each bowel movement.

Chapter 1



Prevention of and Treatment for Constipation

Oftentimes, the best course of treatment is prevention. In this case, the lifestyle changes that you can make to prevent chronic constipation will also help to treat it if the condition already exists. If implementing these tips helps move things along, you might avoid some unpleasant tests described above to treat more severe conditions.

Try to incorporate as many of these tips and tricks⁹ as you can:



Eat a high-fiber diet, including plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, bran and whole grains, and beans. (Fruits that start with 'p' are excellent to move things along, such as peaches, plums, prunes, and pears.)



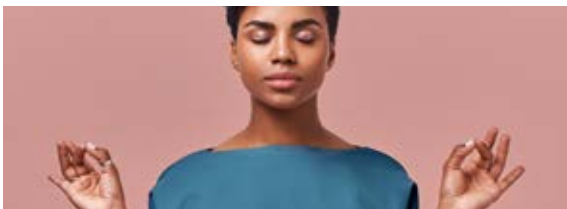
Limit your consumption of processed foods. These contain high amounts of sugar and salt, which can back you up. Too much dairy and meat are also difficult for the liver to process, which affects your digestive system.



Stay hydrated. The more water you consume, the more water will be present in your body, which means the more "hydrated" your poop will be. Soft stool is easier to pass.



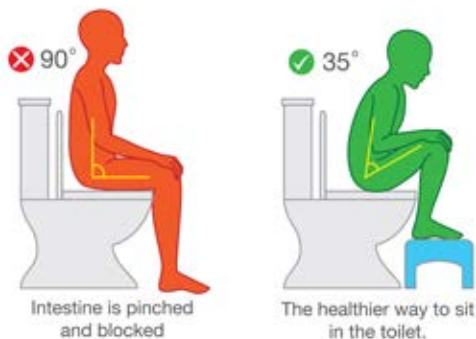
Get regular exercise. You don't necessarily even have to hit the gym. A morning and evening walk around the block can make a big difference. Try taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking at the back of the parking lot, and stretching when getting out of bed and before getting in. Think about this as "accidental exercise" that doesn't take up much time out of your day.



Manage your stress. Remember how hormones affect all your systems? Adrenaline and cortisol can back you up if they aren't tempered with endorphins and dopamine.



When you've gotta go... go! Don't ignore it when you have urges. This will lead to impacted stool and stress about going, which will further cause constipation.



Take regular bathroom breaks. Try allowing yourself a few minutes every day after certain activities, such as having your morning cup of coffee, eating breakfast, or getting home from work. Make the bathroom a relaxing place, bring in a book or magazine, and use a footstool to prop your feet up for prime body positioning.

Conclusion

These are the most common causes of constipation. However, in some cases, the cause isn't ever found. Nevertheless, implementing the above tips into your daily practice benefits healthy bowel movements. They can't hurt, and only help! Then, continue getting second opinions until you feel you have a doctor who listens to you about your struggles, even if you have to undergo a series of tests to figure out the issue.



No one should live their life with their poop keeping them down!



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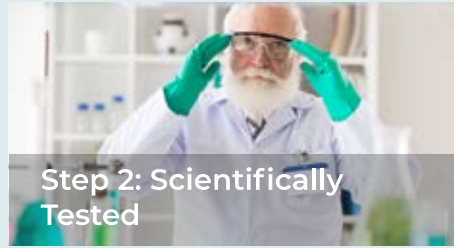


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Resources

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