

Managing Constipation

“How can I tell when I’m constipated?” If you’re having hard, dry and possibly painful bowel movements, less often than usual, then you are probably constipated. Often your lower abdomen will feel heavy, full, and very uncomfortable.

“What causes constipation?” A better question would be **“What PREVENTS constipation?”** Your body requires several things to keep it in balance. Eating a variety of foods with plenty of water each day is essential. Regular exercise is also necessary for a regular bowel pattern. Frequently postponing a bowel movement when you feel that you need to go will also cause bowel function to decrease. Frequent narcotic pain medications are another common cause of constipation. In the absence of regular exercise, poor daily fluid intake and a low-fiber diet, it is not unlikely that normal bowel function will slow down and constipation will be the result.

“What should I do to treat or prevent constipation?” It’s not as difficult as you would think... The key to success is to make a HABIT of doing all of the things below. If these things don’t work, you’ll need to see your doctor or practitioner. Here’s what to do:

- Eat more fiber—fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Increase the amount of daily fiber slowly—your body needs time if you’re not used to it
- Drink 6-8 glasses of water EVERY day—not counting alcohol
- Get some form of exercise EVERY day—walking is just fine
- Use the toilet when you feel like you need to have a bowel movement—don’t put it off. And though it sounds odd—you need to take all the time you need to have a normal bowel movement. You can’t rush these things!
- No laxatives unless your provider says so! Using laxative medications can make your body dependent on these stimulants, and you’ll be unable to establish normal bowel patterns
- Tell your provider or pharmacist about all of the medications that you use regularly. Some combinations of medications can cause constipation and may need to be changed or stopped