

Constipation

What is constipation?

Constipation is having a decreased number of bowel movements or difficulty having a bowel movement.

What causes constipation?

Some common causes of constipation include:

- A diet that is low in fiber.
- Not drinking enough water
- Lack of exercise or physical activity.
- Changes in lifestyle, schedule, routine or travel
- Repeatedly ignoring the urge to have a bowel movement.
- Consuming large amounts of milk or cheese products
- Use of certain medicines such as narcotic pain medicines, antacids with aluminum, some chemotherapy drugs, antidepressants, iron supplements, allergy medicines with antihistamines and anticonvulsants.
- Pregnancy
- Under active thyroid gland, also called Hypothyroidism
- Nerve damage such as injury to the spinal cord, or neurologic disorders such as Multiple Sclerosis (MS) or Parkinson's Disease

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What can be done to avoid constipation?

Normal bowel movement habits are different for each person. How often you have bowel movements can vary from 3 stools a day to 3 stools a week.

- Eat a well-balanced diet that is high in fiber. Good fiber sources include:
 - ▶ Whole-grain breads and cereals
 - ▶ Fresh fruits and vegetables
 - ▶ Legumes and beans
- If you would like more information on a high fiber diet, ask to speak with a dietitian.
- Limit cheese products and refined grain products.
- Drink at least 2 quarts or 8 (8-ounce) glasses of fluid a day.
- Exercise regularly.
- Respond right away to the urge to have a bowel movement. Do not ignore the urge.
- Laxatives are a last resort for treating constipation. Only use laxatives if your doctor tells you to take them.

Talk to your doctor or nurse about any changes in your bowel habits, such as the consistency, color, frequency or change in diameter of stool.

- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**