

Understanding constipation

Q: What is constipation?

A: Constipation is not an easy subject to talk about, but it actually affects most of us at one time or another.

Constipation is when you have

- Fewer than 3 bowel movements per week or fewer than your normal bowel movement frequency
- Difficult and painful bowel movements
- Excessive straining when going
- Hard, dry, or lumpy stools
- A feeling that not all stool has passed

You may also experience a variety of symptoms beyond difficulty going to the bathroom, such as

- Abdominal discomfort
- Gas/bloating
- Lack of energy
- Irritability

Q: What are normal bowel movements?

A: **Normal stools** are soft, well formed, and passed without straining. **Normal frequency** is different for everyone. Some people may go as often as 3 times per day or as little as 3 times per week—all completely normal as long as the frequency is part of your regular routine.

Q: How common is constipation?

A: Very common. Approximately **42 million people** suffer from constipation in the United States. Additionally, women are more likely than men to experience constipation. In fact, 80% of people will experience constipation at some point in their lives.



Understanding constipation (*cont'd*)

Q: What may contribute to constipation?

A: Your digestive system is sensitive to changes in diet and lifestyle, so you should not be surprised or alarmed if once in a while your GI system slows down. Anyone can become constipated, and it does not necessarily mean that you are unhealthy or that you have an unhealthy lifestyle.

Constipation may be caused by

- Low-fiber diet
- Lack of fluid intake
- Lack of exercise
- Travel
- Stress or anxiety
- Disease
- Supplements or medications*

Q: How can I avoid constipation?

A: There are many lifestyle changes you can make to help manage and prevent constipation, including



Establishing a routine

- Set aside time to exercise daily
- Go to the bathroom at the same time every day and take your time



Maintaining a well-balanced diet

- Eat fiber-rich foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and grains
- Drink plenty of water. If you are thirsty, you may be experiencing dehydration



Managing stress

- Take time for yourself while at home or work and consider yoga or meditation as a stress reliever

*Please talk to your doctor about any supplements or medications you are currently taking.

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Understanding constipation (*cont'd*)

Q: Are treatment options available?

A: Yes, **both over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription treatments are available.** For occasional constipation, there are several easily accessible OTC options that offer effective constipation relief. When you have more than occasional constipation, prescription therapy may be an appropriate option.

Talk to your doctor about which constipation treatment option best fits your specific needs.

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doctors, pharmacists,* and gastroenterologists

Available OTC, in the original
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*Pharmacy Times Survey of Pharmacists' OTC Recommendations, 2018.

Use as directed for occasional constipation.

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