

Patient Education



Constipation

Constipation is what happens when fecal material (stool/poop) moves through the large bowel too slow. The fluid part of the stool goes back into the body and the stool becomes hard and dry. This makes it hard to pass stool.

Symptoms

- Stomach cramping.
- Rectal pain.
- Bloating.
- Nausea.
- Feeling full after a bowel movement.

Causes

- Poor nutrition.
- Not enough sleep.
- Little exercise.
- Anxiety.
- Stress.
- Age.
- Effects of a medicine, especially with opioids.
- Some diseases. If with a disease symptoms would also be a sudden change in bowel habit, pain, weight loss, you are tired or have bloody stool.

Before getting help, try these self-care suggestions:

Nutrition – Eat more fiber and drink fluids. This helps constipation!

- Fiber is part of plant food that is not digested.
There are two kinds of fiber: soluble and insoluble:
 1. **Soluble fiber** is in apples, bananas, barley, oats and beans.
 2. **Insoluble fiber** helps to move the food in the digestive tract and helps to prevent constipation. Insoluble fiber is in whole grains, most vegetables, wheat bran and legumes.
- An ideal goal of fiber to eat per day is 20 to 30 grams.

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Meal Planning –

- Eat three meals a day. Do not skip a meal.
- Each day slowly put more high-fiber foods in your diet.
- Eat whole grain breads, cereals and rice.
- Pick more raw fruits and vegetables.
- Look for “dietary fiber” on food labels – a good amount of fiber in a food is 2 grams or more.
- Limit “refined” and “processed” foods.

Activity –

To be active each day is a very important to helping constipation.

- ✓ Do activities, such as walking, 3 or more times per week.
- ✓ Go to bed at the same time each night to get enough sleep.
- ✓ Lower the stress in your life.
- ✓ Go for a short walk when you feel stress or anxiety.

When to get help:

Most can treat constipation on their own at home using the self-care suggestions.

Some information in this handout was adapted from the UCSF Medical Center’s Constipation Handout, 2002-2004

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