

# Constipation

Constipation is defined as a condition in which a person has fewer than three bowel movements a week or has bowel movements with stools that are hard, dry, and small, making them painful or difficult to pass. Constipation is one of the most common gastrointestinal conditions.

## CAUSES OF CONSTIPATION

- Hypothyroidism which causes body systems to slow down including the GI system
- Diabetes causing nerve damage affecting digestion
- Irritable bowel syndrome, Depression, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's
- Too much water is reabsorbed from the colon and/or stool stays in the colon for too long
- Low fiber Diet
- Certain foods such as chocolate, bananas, black tea, too much dairy, eggs, meat, fatty foods, fast foods
- Not drinking enough water
- Lack of exercise (especially the handicapped and elderly)
- Repeated ignoring the urge to defecate, possibly due to being too busy or aversion to use of public restrooms
- Certain medications: pain medication (narcotics but also Aspirin and Ibuprofen taken chronically); SSRI Antidepressants, Calcium Channel Blockers taken for Hypertension, Diuretics, Antihistamines
- Supplements such as calcium, iron, antacids with calcium or aluminum
- Laxative overuse leading to dependence

## PREVENTION / TREATMENT

- Exercise can make bowel movements regular and reduce stress. Wait 1 hour after eating a large meal however before exercising to allow time for digestion
- Adequate fluid intake helps soften the stool, however not caffeinated and alcohol beverages as they can cause dehydration
- Bulk forming laxatives, however always discuss with the physician which are best
- Foods to help prevent constipation include:
  - beans
  - fruits -kiwi, pears, plums, apples, berries especially raspberries, blueberries, and strawberries; dried fruit such as raisins, figs, prunes and apricots

- sweet and regular potatoes including the skins
- air-popped popcorn
- nuts especially almonds, pecans, and walnuts
- seeds like sesame, pumpkin, ground flaxseed
- whole grains
- broccoli and other vegetables

## MEDICATIONS USED FOR TREATMENT OF CONSTIPATION

- Bulk forming laxatives — Metamucil, Fiber Con, Citrucel, Konsyl. These medications absorb fluid into the intestines making the stool bulkier. They must be taken with water to avoid obstruction.
- Osmotic Agents — Milk of Magnesia, Fleet Phosphosoda, Miralax. These agents help soften stool by retaining fluid.
- Stool Softeners — Colace, Docusate, Surfax. These agents mix fluid into the stool to soften it. These are suggested frequently for those who need to avoid straining.
- Stimulants — Correctol, Dulcolax, Senokot. These agents cause the intestine to contract moving the stool and are used for severe constipation.
- Chloride Channel Activators — Amitiza. This medication is available only by prescription. This type of laxative increases fluid in the GI tract.
- The physician may recommend drinking increased amount of fluids and emptying the bladder frequently to help flush out the bacteria. The physician may also prescribe a medication that numbs the bladder and urethra to relieve the burning with urination. This medication typically discolors the urine orange or red.
- Read the information provided by the pharmacy to be aware of possible side effects and potential symptoms of allergic reaction.
- Notify the physician if symptoms worsen after two days of treatment.

For further training on this or other topics please call Milestone HCQU Northwest at 814-728-9400.

