

(Can be downloadable)

## **Constipation and Natural Remedies**

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### **Warning to patients:**

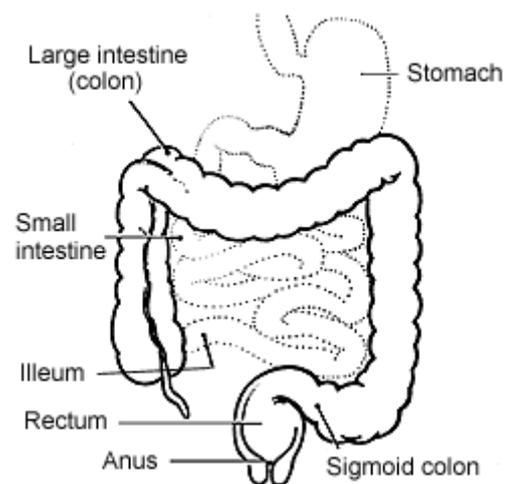
*Always consult your Doctor before you consume any medicine. Self-medication is often dangerous and is to be always avoided. The information given below is merely as a service from Kinedex Healthcare Pvt Ltd., to increase awareness on health issues.*

### **What is Constipation?**

Constipation affects almost everyone at one time or another. Many people think they are constipated when, in fact, their bowel movements are regular.

Constipation refers to the passage of small amounts of hard, dry bowel movements, usually fewer than three times a week. People who are constipated may find it difficult and painful to have a bowel movement. Other symptoms of constipation include feeling bloated, uncomfortable, and sluggish.

There is no right number of daily or weekly bowel movements. Normal may be three times a day or three times a week depending on the person. Also, some people naturally have firmer stools than others.



The lower digestive tract

### **Who gets constipated?**

Constipation is very common in women and adults age 65 and over. Pregnant women may have constipation, and it is a common problem following childbirth or surgery.

### **What causes constipation?**

Common causes of constipation are

- not enough fiber in the diet
- not enough liquids
- lack of exercise
- medications
- irritable bowel syndrome
- changes in life or routine such as pregnancy, older age, and travel
- abuse of laxatives
- ignoring the urge to have a bowel movement
- specific diseases such as stroke (by far the most common)
- problems with the colon and rectum
- problems with intestinal function (chronic idiopathic constipation)

## **What diagnostic tests are used?**

Most people with constipation do not need extensive testing and can be treated with changes in diet and exercise. The tests the doctor performs depend on the duration and severity of the constipation, the person's age, and whether blood in stools, recent changes in bowel movements, or weight loss have occurred.

Generally medical history and physical examination by the Doctor is adequate. Occasionally, additional tests may be advised, such as colorectal transit study, anorectal function tests and at times even barium enema x ray & colonoscopy.

## **How is constipation treated?**

Although treatment depends on the cause, severity, and duration, in most cases dietary and lifestyle changes will help relieve symptoms of constipation and help prevent it.

### **Diet**

A diet with enough fiber (20 to 35 grams each day) helps form soft, bulky stool. A doctor or dietitian can help plan an appropriate diet. High-fiber foods include beans, whole grains and bran cereals, fresh fruits, and vegetables such as asparagus, brussels sprouts, cabbage, and carrots. For people prone to constipation, limiting foods that have little or no fiber, such as ice cream, cheese, meat, and processed foods, is also important.

### **Lifestyle Changes**

Other changes that can help treat and prevent constipation include drinking enough water and other liquids such as fruit and vegetable juices and clear soups, engaging in daily exercise, and reserving enough time to have a bowel movement. In addition, the urge to have a bowel movement should not be ignored.

### **Laxatives**

Most people who are mildly constipated do not need laxatives. However, for those who have made diet and lifestyle changes and are still constipated, doctors may recommend laxatives or enemas for a limited time.

Whenever a specific cause has been identified by the Doctor, the treatment approach will be towards tackling the specific cause.

## **Can constipation be serious?**

Sometimes constipation can lead to complications. These complications include hemorrhoids caused by straining to have a bowel movement or anal fissures (tears in the skin around the anus) caused when hard stool stretches the sphincter muscle. As a result, rectal bleeding may occur, appearing as bright red streaks on the surface of the stool. Treatment for hemorrhoids may include warm tub baths, ice packs, and application of a special cream to the affected area. Treatment for anal fissure may include stretching the sphincter muscle or surgical removal of tissue or skin in the affected area.

### **Tips to avoid Constipation:**

In most cases, following these simple tips will help relieve symptoms and prevent recurrence of constipation:

- Eat a well-balanced, high-fiber diet that includes beans, bran, whole grains, fresh fruits, and vegetables.
- Drink plenty of liquids.
- Exercise regularly.
- Set aside time after breakfast or dinner for undisturbed visits to the toilet.
- Do not ignore the urge to have a bowel movement.
- Understand that normal bowel habits vary.
- Whenever a significant or prolonged change in bowel habits occurs, check with a doctor.

**(Source: Adapted from <http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/constipation>)**

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