

DESCRIPTION

Constipation is a digestive problem characterized by having fewer bowel movements than usual and difficulty in passing stools. There is no right number of daily or weekly bowel movements. Everyone has different bowel patterns. A normal range is anywhere between 3 times a day to 3 times a week.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Hard, dry, or lumpy stools.
- Having to strain to have a bowel movement.
- Pain or bleeding with bowel movements.
- Feeling bloated or sluggish.
- Feeling like you still need to go after having a bowel movement.

PREVENTING CONSTIPATION

- Don't resist or ignore the urge to have a bowel movement
- Allow plenty of time to have a bowel movement without rushing.
- Avoid using laxatives except when absolutely necessary.

DIET

- Eat a well-balanced diet including plenty of fiber. 2 cups of fruits and 2 ½ cups of vegetables per day is recommended.
- Limit foods that are high in fat and sugar (such as sweets, cheeses and processed foods). These foods may cause constipation.
- When adding fiber to your diet, start slowly and gradually increase the amount. This will help reduce temporary symptoms such as gas, bloating and cramping.
- Drink plenty of fluids, including water, juices, tea, and other drinks. Drinking at least 8 glasses of water a day is preferred.
- Exercise regularly.

LAXATIVES

Laxatives should generally be avoided unless specifically recommended by your physician. Most laxatives are not meant for long-term use and overuse may actually make constipation worse. After long-term overuse of laxatives and/or enemas, it may take months to retrain your body to go without them. Your physician may suggest that you gradually decrease the use of laxatives to allow your digestive system time to adjust to the changes.

Bulk-Forming Laxatives:

These may be used on a regular basis. They work naturally to add bulk and water to your stools, allowing them to pass more easily through your intestines. Some examples of bulk-forming laxatives are oat bran, Metamucil® (psyllium), FiberCon® (polycarbophil) and Citrucel® (methylcellulose).

Other Laxatives:

Mineral oil or any stimulant laxative should be avoided unless specifically instructed by your physician. Regular use of mineral oil may result in vitamin deficiencies while overuse of stimulant laxatives may result in dependence.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF

- Constipation persists despite self-care, especially if the constipation is a change in your normal bowel patterns.
- Your stools become very dark, tarry or you notice blood in your stools.
- You begin "leaking" very liquid stools.
- You experience unexplained weight loss.
- You develop a fever or severe abdominal pain or vomiting.