

Constipation

Severity

Complexity

Duration

Description

The frequency of normal bowel movements can vary significantly from person to person. Constipation is generally classified as less than 2 bowel motions in a week and associated with symptoms of straining, a feeling of incomplete evacuation and hard lumpy stools.

Typical Symptoms

Normal bowel movements can vary significantly from person to person and normal might mean 3 times a day or 3 times a week. People who are suffering from constipation:

- may find it painful to have a bowel movement and
- often experience straining
- experience bloating and the sensation of a full bowel

Constipation is typically a symptom, not a disease. A poor diet or a side effect of medications is typically the underlying cause.

Seek further Medical help

You should speak to your Doctor or Pharmacist if:

- you are experiencing re-occurring episodes of constipation
- constipation is alternating with diarrhoea
- you have noticed blood in your faeces
- you have tried laxatives but they have not worked
- you need more information about the important role of diet

Treatment

Correcting lifestyle factors, that may contribute to constipation, is the best place to start. It is important to make sure you are:

- getting an adequate amount of dietary fibre and fluid intake,
- avoiding inappropriate bowel habits (eg ignoring the urge to defecate)
- regularly undertaking physical activity/exercise.

If lifestyle changes are not enough alone, the use of laxatives may be appropriate. The following types are available over the counter but like any medication it is best to discuss with your Doctor or Pharmacist to determine which one might be best for you.

● **Bulk forming laxatives** (eg Metamucil, Benefibre) increase bulk and moisture in the stool, stimulating bowel movement. Rapid increases in dosage can result in flatulence and a feeling of bloating. This treatment usually takes around 24 hours, but 2 to 3 days of use may be required to achieve the full effect.

● **Osmotic laxatives** (eg Movicol, Lactulose), draw water into the colon which expands and softens stools. Their effect is more rapid if they are taken on an empty stomach, and should occur within 2 to 48 hours. When using an osmotic laxative it is important to drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration.

● **Stimulant laxatives** (eg Dulcolax, Senna) stimulate intestinal motility (bowel movement). They should take effect within 6 to 12 hours. Previous concerns that overuse of stimulant laxatives could lead to a "lazy bowel" is not supported by evidence.



Warning - Always read the label. Use only as directed. Incorrect use can be harmful. Contact your doctor or healthcare professional if pain or symptoms persist. Vitamin supplements may only be of assistance if dietary intake is inadequate. Health information is general in nature and you must seek appropriate medical advice for your personal condition.

MORE INFO?
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