

Constipation

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If you have trouble passing stools or have fewer than three bowel movements a week, you have constipation. Signs include:

- fewer number of bowel movements
- small, hard stools that are difficult to pass
- feeling bloated and uncomfortable
- gas
- abdominal cramping.

Constipation can lead to more problems with your bowel or bladder.

Causes

Constipation can be caused by many things:

- prescription medicines (especially pain medicine)
- iron pills
- lack of water
- lack of exercise
- not enough fiber in foods you eat
- certain diseases (stroke, multiple sclerosis)
- spinal cord injuries
- laxative abuse.

Prevent Constipation

- Drink six to eight 8-ounce glasses of water each day. Water adds moisture to stools, which make them easier to pass.
- Avoid alcohol and beverages that have caffeine (coffee, tea, soda) because they rob your body of water.
- Eat well-balanced meals and snacks. Include a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals, unprocessed bran and foods rich in fiber.
- It's important not to add too much fiber if you aren't used to it. Try this mixture:
 - 1 cup applesauce
 - 1 cup oat bran or unprocessed wheat bran
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup prune juice.Keep in the refrigerator or freezer (single-serving portions). Start with 1 to 2 tablespoons each evening before bed with one 6- to 8-ounce glass of water or juice. Your bowel movements should become regular in 2 weeks. If not, you can increase up to 3 to 4 tablespoons of the mixture.
- Be as active as you can each day. Follow your health care provider's directions.
- Go to the bathroom when you feel the urge.
- Limit using laxatives or enemas on a regular basis, unless your health care provider gives you other directions.

(over)

When To Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if you have:

- changes in your bowel habits
- no bowel movement for 3 days
- severe abdominal pain
- blood in your stool
- a history of constipation.