

Self Care - Constipation

What is constipation?

Constipation is a very common condition that affects people of all ages. It can mean that you are not passing stools (pooping) as often as you normally do, or you have to strain more than usual to empty your bowels. You may notice your poo is unusually hard, or like small pellets, or it may be painful to pass a stool.

Why does it happen?

Common causes include not eating enough fibre, not drinking enough fluid and not doing enough exercise. Sometimes if you are out of your normal routine (for example, going on holiday or staying away from home) you can experience difficulty opening your bowels.

How long does it last?

The severity of constipation can vary greatly. Most people only experience constipation for a few weeks with no lasting effects on their health. Constipation rarely causes any complications or long-term health problems. A small number of people suffer constipation over many months or years.

How can it be treated?

Often you are able to treat constipation without having to see a doctor. Simple things you can try are:

- Increase your daily intake of fibre. High-fibre foods include fruit, vegetables and cereals
- Add some bulking agents, such as wheat bran, to your diet. These will help make your stools softer and easier to pass
- Increase your fluid intake. Drink at least 1-2 litres (six to eight glasses) of fluid a day
- Get more exercise by going for a daily walk or run
- Try to find a place and time of day when you are comfortably able to spend time in the toilet. Respond to your bowel's natural pattern: when you feel the urge, do not delay!
- There are some medicines available from the pharmacy without a prescription. Your pharmacist will be able to advise you on an appropriate medication. Be careful not to use medications for constipation for a long time because this can cause your bowels to become lazy and make the problem worse.

When do I need to see a Doctor?

If you have any of the following symptoms as well as constipation, you should see your doctor:

- weight loss
- bleeding when you open your bowels
- a feeling of needing to pass a stool when there is nothing to pass.

Source www.nhs.uk and www.webmentorlibrary.com

If you would like further advice contact NHS Direct on 08454647 or see www.nhs.uk



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