

SHOPPING LIST

Foods that can help with constipation

- Whole grain breads
- Cereal
- Pasta
- Dried fruits
Apricots, dates, prunes and raisins
- Berries
(Blackberries, blueberries, raspberries and strawberries)
- Oranges
- Apples with skin
- Avocado
- Broccoli
- Spinach and other dark green leafy vegetables
- Dried peas and beans
(Kidney, lima, black-eyed beans and lentils)
- Nuts and seeds
(Almonds, whole flaxseed and soynuts)



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LIVING HEALTHY WITH CHRONIC PAIN



CONSTIPATION

dealing with constipation

CONSTIPATION

DEALING WITH CONSTIPATION

By Christa Jensen, CNP

Millions of people suffer from chronic constipation. Constipation is a symptom and not a disease. It is one of the most common digestive complaints in the United States. Constipation is defined as a decrease in the frequency of bowel movements.

Signs of constipation include:

- hard stools
- straining during the bowel movement
- sensation of incomplete evacuation
- less than three bowel movements per week
- excessive time spent on the toilet

Rectal bleeding, abdominal pain, vomiting and unexplained weight loss are some symptoms that should be evaluated further.

Studies have shown that females are more affected by constipation than males. Also, there is an increased incidence of constipation in the non-caucasian population. Constipation happens more often as people age.

Constipation can have a significant impact on a person's quality of life. Physical functioning, vitality, social functioning, mental health, perception of health and pain are all affected by constipation.

Possible causes of constipation:

- Low fiber diet. Eating foods rich in animal fats or refined sugar increase incidence of constipation
- Poor bowel habits. Ignoring the signal to have a bowel movement may initiate a cycle of constipation
- Structural changes such as hemorrhoids, strictures and tumors
- Metabolic and endocrine disorders such as

thyroid problems, diabetes and electrolyte changes

- Neurological disorders such as Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury and muscular dystrophy
- Pregnancy
- Colorectal or ovarian cancer
- Psychiatric disorders such as depression, anorexia and anxiety
- Lead poisoning
- Medications

Constipation can be a side effect of nearly any medication that is used on a long term basis. Constipation can occur with all opioids (narcotics) and may need to be managed in addition to your pain. The risk of using these medications must be balanced with the benefits.

Types of medications that could cause constipation include:

- Antidepressants
- Metals (iron, bismuth)
- Opioids (narcotic pain medications)
- Antacids
- Calcium channel blockers (verapamil)
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs ie. ibuprofen)
- Sympathomimetics (pseudoephedrine)
- Stimulant laxatives-long term use
- Antipsychotics

It is very important to discuss constipation with your health care provider. Letting constipation go untreated can be dangerous.

Medication side effects should always be discussed with your health care provider. There are multiple forms of treatment and management options for constipation.

Anyone who enters a pharmacy will note the large amount of over the counter (OTC) medications. There are a number of OTC medications that treat and manage constipation. Be aware that herbal and nutritional supplements have not been scientifically proven to treat symptoms and may interact with your current medications. Some of the medications used for constipation do require a prescription from your health care provider.

Medication options include:

- Bulk-forming agents: Metamucil, Citrucel and fiber draw water into the intestine, increase stool weight and soften stool
- Surfactant or softening agents: Colace and Surfak are surfactants that enable water and fats to mix with stool which softens it
- Osmotic laxative agents: Milk of Magnesia, Miralax and Sorbitol laxatives cause secretion of water into the bowel and are often used prior to medical procedures
- Stimulant Laxatives agents: Bisacodyl, castor oil and senna stimulate muscle contractions and cause secretion of water into the bowel
- Enema agents: Warm-water or mineral oil enemas

HOW TO PREVENT & MANAGE CONSTIPATION

- Drink adequate amounts of water and juice
- Exercise regularly
- Eat a high fiber diet
- Avoid or decrease use of constipating medications
- Acupuncture and acupressure
- Biofeedback and pelvic floor retraining
- Regulating bowel habits

