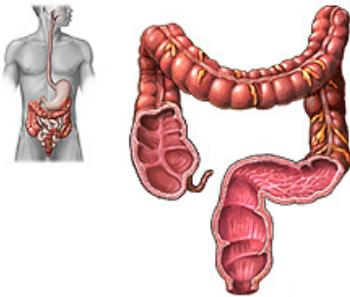


## CONSTIPATION

Peter Zajac, DO, FCOFP, Author

Amy J. Keenum, DO, PharmD, Editor • Ronald Januchowski, DO, FCOFP, Health Literacy Editor



Constipation is difficulty having a bowel movement or when you have fewer bowel movements than usual. The stool can be hard, dry, and sometimes painful to pass. You may also have stomach pain, fullness, bloating, the feeling of rectal pressure, and the need to strain. Common causes of constipation include a diet low in fiber, not drinking enough water, lack of exercise, changes in lifestyle or routine, emotional stress, inadequate sleep, pregnancy, age, ignoring the urge to have a bowel movement, certain medications (e.g. pain medications), and medical conditions.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES INCLUDE:

- Eat three well-balanced meals each day. Do not miss any meals.
- Gradually increase the amount of high-fiber foods in your diet. A diet with enough fiber (i.e. about 20 to 35 grams each day), helps form soft and bulky stool. Good sources of high-fiber include beans, whole-grain breads, rice, and bran cereals along with fresh fruits and vegetables such as Brussels sprouts, cabbage, and carrots.
- Limit the amount of milk or cheese products, highly refined and processed foods in the diet.
- Drink six to eight (8-ounce) glasses of water each day.
- Exercise regularly. Weight bearing exercises, such as walking, three or more times each week is helpful.
- Minimize stress in your life. Go for a short walk when you feel stress increasing.
- Go to sleep at a regular time each night. Make sure you get enough sleep.
- Respond right away to the urge to have a bowel movement. Do not ignore the urge.
- Consider reviewing your medications with your physician for ones that can make constipation worse.
- You should only use laxatives as needed for treating constipation and if approved by your doctor.
- Prunes or prune juice is often useful in maintaining regular bowel function.
- If you have any medical conditions, ask your doctor whether they predispose you to constipation and what can be done.

### MEDICAL CARE & TREATMENT OPTIONS:

If you have any questions about constipation, please contact your Osteopathic Family Physician. Your physician can diagnose constipation with a thorough history and physical exam along with appropriate tests. Management includes the right treatment plan and regular visits with your doctor. Your family doctor will help you choose which treatment(s) will work best for you. In case of any emergency, you should call your doctor or 911 right away.

---

**SOURCE(S):** American Family Physician, Constipation. Gov, Medscape, & Up-To-Date.

The Osteopathic Family Physician Patient Handout is a public service of the ACOFP. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in many instances; however, they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis by a physician. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, ACOFP suggests that you consult your family physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with their patients.

**For additional patient related educational material please visit our website at [www.acofp.org](http://www.acofp.org)**