

Treating and Preventing Constipation

What is constipation?

Constipation is when you feel like you are not able to have a complete bowel movement. You can also have hard stool, stomach pain, bloating, or swelling.

How is it treated and prevented?

- When you feel like you need to have a bowel movement, go to the bathroom right away.
- Try to have a bowel movement right after a meal.
- Try sitting on the toilet with your feet on a short footrest. This position may make it easier to have a bowel movement.
- Eat more fiber. Foods that are high in fiber are whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. You can also take fiber supplements, such as Metamucil. You should try to eat 20 to 35 grams of fiber each day.
- Drink more fluids. This can help the fiber to work better.
- Take a stool softener every day.
- If you still have trouble having a bowel movement, take an over-the-counter laxative, such as polyethylene glycol (Miralax).

When should I see the doctor?

- If you see blood in your bowel movement, which can be a sign of a more serious problem
- If the recommendations listed here do not help
- If you are older than 50 years and have not been screened for colon cancer

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Notes:

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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