

# Understanding constipation

## Q: What is constipation?

**A:** Constipation is not an easy subject to talk about, but it actually affects most of us at one time or another.

### Constipation is when you have

- Fewer than 3 bowel movements per week or fewer than your normal bowel movement frequency
- Difficult and painful bowel movements
- Excessive straining when going
- Hard, dry, or lumpy stools
- A feeling that not all stool has passed

### You may also experience a variety of symptoms beyond difficulty going to the bathroom, such as

- Abdominal discomfort
- Gas/bloating
- Lack of energy
- Irritability

## Q: What are normal bowel movements?

**A:** **Normal stools** are soft, well formed, and passed without straining. **Normal frequency** is different for everyone. Some people may go as often as 3 times per day or as little as 3 times per week—all completely normal as long as the frequency is part of your regular routine.

## Q: How common is constipation?

**A:** Very common. Approximately **42 million people** suffer from constipation in the United States. Additionally, women are more likely than men to experience constipation. In fact, 80% of people will experience constipation at some point in their lives.



# Understanding constipation (*cont'd*)

## Q: What may contribute to constipation?

**A:** Your digestive system is sensitive to changes in diet and lifestyle, so you should not be surprised or alarmed if once in a while your GI system slows down. Anyone can become constipated, and it does not necessarily mean that you are unhealthy or that you have an unhealthy lifestyle.

### Constipation may be caused by

- Low-fiber diet
- Lack of fluid intake
- Lack of exercise
- Travel
- Stress or anxiety
- Disease
- Supplements or medications\*

## Q: How can I avoid constipation?

**A:** There are many lifestyle changes you can make to help manage and prevent constipation, including



### Establishing a routine

- Set aside time to exercise daily
- Go to the bathroom at the same time every day and take your time



### Maintaining a well-balanced diet

- Eat fiber-rich foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and grains
- Drink plenty of water. If you are thirsty, you may be experiencing dehydration



### Managing stress

- Take time for yourself while at home or work and consider yoga or meditation as a stress reliever

\*Please talk to your doctor about any supplements or medications you are currently taking.

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# Understanding constipation (*cont'd*)

## Q: Are treatment options available?

**A:** Yes, **both over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription treatments are available.** For occasional constipation, there are several easily accessible OTC options that offer effective constipation relief. When you have more than occasional constipation, prescription therapy may be an appropriate option.

**Talk to your doctor about which constipation treatment option best fits your specific needs.**

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\*Pharmacy Times Survey of Pharmacists' OTC Recommendations, 2018.

Use as directed for occasional constipation.

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