

2014

Constipation

Constipation

What is a “normal” bowel function?

“Normal” bowel function can be different from person to person. Many people have one bowel movement a day. It also is normal to have 2-3 a day or only 3-4 a week. You only consider yourself constipated when your bowels are **not moving as often as they normally do**. Constipation once in a while is common and is not a cause for concern. If the problem continues, see your family doctor.

Some causes of constipation are:

- Not eating enough fibre.
- Not drinking enough fluids.
- Ignoring the urge to have a bowel movement. This often happens when someone is travelling.
- Using laxatives frequently. The muscles of the bowel get lazy and depend on the laxative.
- Many medications can cause constipation. Medications ordered by your doctor for a variety of health problems and over the counter medications can all cause constipation. Opioid medications usually cause constipation. If someone is taking opioids (such as codeine, morphine, hydromorphone, etc.) regularly, he/she should have a plan to avoid this problem.
- Postponing trips to the bathroom to avoid pain, e.g., if a person has hemorrhoids.
- Lack of exercise.

Tips to prevent constipation

Do not ignore the urge to have a bowel movement

While the stool stays in the bowel, water is re-absorbed back into the body. This makes the stool hard and difficult to pass. The urge to move the bowels often follows shortly after a meal, usually breakfast. Arrange your schedule so you have time to take advantage of this urge.

Eat more fibre

Fibre is the part of the plant which your body can not digest. It is found in whole grain products, fruits, vegetables, and legumes.

Some foods high in fibre are:

Cereals and grains:

- › All-Bran®
- › Kellogg's Raisin Bran®
- › Breads, muffins, and cereals made with bran
- › Oatmeal
- › Kellogg's Bran 100%®
- › Whole wheat bread and pasta

Fruits and vegetables:

- › Baked beans
- › Peas
- › Dates, figs, and raisins
- › Prunes

Nuts:

- › Almonds
- › Peanuts

Eat breakfast every day

Eating 3 small meals promotes better bowel function. Some suggestions for breakfast are high fibre cereal, fruit, or yogurt with bran buds and fruit. If you like to eat toast, make it whole wheat toast.

Drink plenty of fluids

Drink at least 6 large glasses each day.

Exercise regularly

Remember to replace any water lost from sweating.

If your medications are causing constipation:

- Make sure you follow all the tips in this pamphlet.
- Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about taking a stool softener regularly.

Call your family doctor if you continue to be constipated and:

- You start vomiting.
- You are having abdominal (tummy) pain.
- Your abdomen is swollen or bloated.

If you are having the symptoms listed above and you cannot contact your family doctor, see the doctor on duty at your doctor's office, or return to the Emergency Department.

If you have any questions, please ask.
We are here to help you.

Looking for more health information?

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.
For more information go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

*Capital Health promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.
Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!*

Capital Health, Nova Scotia
www.cdha.nshealth.ca

Prepared by: Emergency Services
Designed by: Capital Health Library Services, Patient Education Team
Printed by: Dalhousie University Print Centre

The information in this brochure is provided for informational and educational purposes only.
The information is not intended to be and does not constitute healthcare or medical advice.
If you have any questions, please ask your healthcare provider.