

# Constipation

Constipation is a significant decrease in a person's normal number of bowel movements. Constipation may also include the difficult passage of stools. Occasional constipation is very common. Constipation may be caused by many factors including diet, lifestyle, and/or medication.



## Symptoms:

- Less than normal number of bowel movements per week
- Lumpy or hard stools
- Straining during a bowel movement

## Self-care measures:

- Eat high fiber foods combined with increased fluid intake
  - Aim for 25 grams of fiber per day
    - High fiber foods include raw fruits and vegetables; whole grains like oatmeal, bran, whole-wheat, and popcorn; and nuts/seeds
    - Use fiber supplements containing Psyllium
  - Drink 1.5-2.0 liters (50-68 ounces) of non-alcoholic/non-caffeine fluids per day
- Use an over-the-counter stool softener containing Docusate Sodium (Colace®)
- Use an over-the-counter laxative containing polyethylene glycol (PEG) (Miralax®)
- Avoid frequent use of stimulant laxatives such as Ex-Lax®, Correctol®, Dulcolax®, and Feen-a-mint®. Overuse of these products may cause the colon to become dependent on these medications.

## When to see a medical provider:

- If you have symptoms of constipation and a fever
- If you have symptoms of constipation and nausea/vomiting
- Changes in bowel habits that last more than 3 months and are not explained by a change in diet or medication
- If you lose more than 10 pounds without trying