

UAB Health Education

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

CONSTIPATION



Constipation is a condition in which the stool is hard or dry which may cause bowel movements to occur less frequently and/or to be more painful. It can be caused by many factors, including lifestyle, diet or medications. Everyone has a different schedule of bowel movements, but if your bowel movements become less frequent, are hard, and if you are physically uncomfortable, you may be experiencing constipation. Generally, a person with constipation may have less than three bowel movements per week and stools will be hard and dry. Constipation is very common and will often go away with lifestyle modifications and home treatments.

SYMPTOMS

- Hard, dry stool that is difficult to pass/straining
- Bloating, feeling uncomfortable
- Having less than 3 bowel movements per week
- Feeling like you still need to have a bowel movement, even after having one

DIAGNOSIS

Based on symptoms and physical exam. It may be helpful if you can take note of when you last had a bowel movement and the frequency as well as any recent changes in your diet, daily routine or medications.

TREATMENT

- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water (8 glasses/day)
- Add fiber to your diet, recommended 20-35 g/day, you can consider fiber supplements, such as psyllium (Metamucil)
- Sometimes a laxative or stool softeners such as polyethylene glycol (Miralax) or docusate (Colace) can be helpful, but regular use of laxatives can interfere with your body's ability to establish a normal bowel regimen
- Increase your activity, try to get 30 minutes of exercise daily

CALL STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES IF:

- Constipation is associated with weight loss, fevers or weakness
- You also have abdominal pain, nausea, or vomiting
- Constipation is a new problem or if you need to use laxatives regularly
- You see significant blood in your stool or if your stools are black
- You cannot pass stool at all

RESOURCES

FamilyDoctor.org <https://familydoctor.org/condition/constipation/>

Mayo Clinic <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/constipation/symptoms-causes/syc-20354253>

NIH <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases/constipation>

RISK FACTORS

- Inadequate fluid intake/dehydration
- Diet low in fiber
- Lack of physical activity
- Changes in routine, such as travel
- Laxative abuse
- Certain medications such as iron, calcium, antacids, antidepressants or cough suppressants

PREVENTION

- Do not hold it in when you feel the urge to have a bowel movement
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water (8 glasses/day)
- Increase your dietary fiber (some foods high in fiber include bran, cereal, fruit, raw vegetables, beans, whole grains)
- Increase your activity, try to get 30 minutes of exercise daily



STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Clinic: 205-934-3580

After Hours: 205-934-3411

<https://www.uab.edu/students/health/>

Last Updated 08/2020