

Constipation 101



CDHF.ca

Constipation is the most frequent gastrointestinal complaint that patients bring up to their physician. It occurs when your stool becomes **too dry or too hard to pass easily.**¹

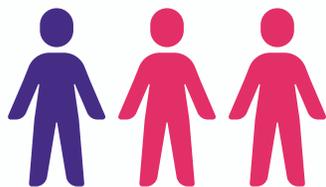
Signs and Symptoms

- Abdominal pain
- Difficult and painful bowel movements
- Lower frequency of bowel movements (Compared to normal)
- Bloating



1 in 3²

adults over the **age of 60** experience occasional constipation.



When Should I See a Doctor?

According to ROME IV criteria,³ functional constipation can be diagnosed if **two or more** of the following symptoms occur:

1. Straining during more than 25% of defecations
2. Lumpy or hard stools more than 25% of defecations
3. Sensation of incomplete evacuation more than 25% of defecations
4. Sensation of obstruction/blockage more than 25% of defecations
5. Manual maneuvers to facilitate more than 25% of defecations (e.g., digital evacuation, support of the pelvic floor)
6. Fewer than 3 bowel movements per week
7. Loose stools are rarely present without the use of laxatives
8. Insufficient criteria for Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Treatment Options⁴

Increase Fibre & Fluid Intake

Consuming a diet rich in fibre along with enough fluids is important to prevent and treat constipation.

It is generally recommended that men eat **38 grams** of fibre per day, and that women eat **25 grams** per day.



Exercise Regularly

Regular and consistent exercise helps relieve constipation by lowering the amount of time it takes for food to move through the large intestine, which limits the amount of water your body gets a chance to absorb from the stool.



Try a Laxative

Laxatives can help relieve and prevent constipation.

- Stimulant laxatives
- Bulk-forming laxatives
- Osmotic Laxatives
- Stool softeners



*Make sure to follow all the instructions on the labels, especially for powder-form laxatives that may need to be mixed with a glass of water or juice.

While the most cases of constipation are not a sign of concern, there are some scenarios in which you may want to speak with a doctor, including:⁵

- Over-the-counter laxatives and fibre are not working after 3-4 weeks.
- If you are 50+, experiencing constipation for the first time and have never had a colonoscopy.
- Constipation is accompanied with symptoms including bleeding, weight loss & anemia.

References:

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3. Rome IV criteria. Rome Foundation. <https://theromefoundation.org/rome-iv/rome-iv-criteria/>. Published October 19, 2020. Accessed June 16, 2022.
4. CDHF. What To Do If You Can't Poop. (2022). <https://cdhf.ca/en/constipation-what-to-do-if-you-cant-poop/>
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