

## Constipation

Constipation is a very common ailment that refers to a change in bowel habits.

### Frequent Signs & Symptoms

Abdominal pain is common with constipation, but other symptoms may be present:

- Stools may be too hard or too small
- Stools may be difficult to pass, or infrequent (less than three times per week)
- You will often feel a need to strain and a sense that the bowels are not empty

### Causes

Although there can be many causes of constipation, the most common occurs when waste or stool moves too slowly through the digestive tract or cannot be eliminated effectively from the rectum, which may cause the stool to become hard and dry.

### Prevention

- Exercise
- High fiber diet
  - Vegetables
  - Whole grain cereals/bran
  - Beans
  - Fruits
- Staying well hydrated (drink plenty of fluids)
- Not ignoring the urge to pass stool
- Managing your stress

### Diagnosis

Most people can treat constipation at home, without seeing a healthcare provider. However, you should speak with a healthcare provider if the problem:

- Is new, such as a change in your normal pattern
- Lasts longer than three weeks
- Is severe
- Is associated with other concerns
  - Blood in stools
  - Weight loss
  - Weakness
  - Severe abdominal pain

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If you do see you see your healthcare provider, they will do a physical examination. You should also mention any medications you take regularly since some medications can cause constipation.

### Treatment

Treatment recommended by your provider may include:

- Fiber supplements
- Stool softeners
- Laxatives
- Dietary changes
- Sometimes medications

### Complications

If left untreated, Constipation can cause:

- Hemorrhoids which are swollen veins in your anus
- Torn skin around your anus
- Impaction which is stool that gets tuck in your intestines
- Rectal prolapse where part of your intestine protrudes from your anus

**If symptoms worsen or do not improve, return to the clinic.**

**If you have worsening of symptoms when the Health and Wellness Center is unavailable, please follow up with the local ER or Urgent Care.**