



UNDERSTANDING CONSTIPATION

Overview

Constipation is a condition of infrequent or uncomfortable bowel movements. It is a common disorder that is often described as the passage of small, hard stools; the feeling that the rectum has not been completely emptied; or, straining during defecation.

For some, constipation sometimes develops suddenly and lasts for a short time. For others, particularly those who are aging, constipation may begin gradually and last for an extended period of time.

It is important to realize that the frequency of bowel movements varies from person to person. Some people may empty their bowels several times a day while others may only have a bowel movement once every few days. Whatever is normal for you, is fine.

Constipation most often occurs when the food we have digested moves too slowly through the digestive tract. When stools move slowly, more water is absorbed from the stools causing them to become hard, dry and difficult to pass. Several factors, including dehydration, changes in diet, lack of exercise, stress, pregnancy, enlargement of the rectum, impaired coordination of the pelvic and anal muscles, and certain medications may slow transit of stool.

How is constipation treated?

Fortunately, constipation can usually be treated successfully. There are simple steps you can take to improve your bowel habits.

Increase the amount of fibre in your diet

Fibre provides roughage that helps the large intestines carry away waste products. It also helps to retain water in the stool. Foods that are high in fibre include whole grains, bran, and fresh vegetables and fruits.

Increase the amount of liquids you drink.

It is recommended that we drink 8-10 glasses a day of liquid, which could include water, juices, milk, soup or other beverages. Liquids with caffeine or alcohol increase urination and should not be included in this total.

Increase your activity level

A sedentary lifestyle decreases bowel activity. Regular exercise is recommended to help prevent this. Even regular walking can be of significant benefit.

Develop a regular bowel routine

If you can set aside the same time each day to relax and have a bowel movement, your body will become accustomed to this pattern over time. Remember to avoid straining.

CONSTIPATION

Develop a regular lifestyle

Irregular eating and sleeping patterns may lead to irregular bowel habits.

Listen to your body

By responding to your body's urges promptly, your bowel reflexes are more likely to become normal and regular. Familiarity with local facilities is important, so that when you feel the urge to pass stools, there is no delay.

Avoid overuse of laxatives

There are different types of laxatives. The regular use of certain stimulant laxatives will decrease tone in the bowel leading to poor bowel function. Some herbal laxatives contain stimulants. Other laxatives, simply retain more water in the stool and are safe for regular use. Regular use of laxatives should be approved by your doctor.

More information

For more information about protecting and enhancing your digestive health, please visit www.CDHF.ca

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- Please send me information about protecting and improving my digestive health.

Over 20 million Canadians suffer from digestive disorders every year. The Canadian Digestive Health Foundation believes this is unnecessary and unacceptable.

We reduce suffering and improve quality of life by empowering Canadians with trusted, up to date, science-based information about digestive health and disease.

As the Foundation of the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology, we work directly with leading physicians, scientists, and other health care professionals to help you understand and take control of your digestive health with confidence and optimism.

Through research and public education, we aim to:

 <p>REDUCE the incidence and prevalence of digestive disorders</p>	 <p>IMPROVE understanding of digestive health issues</p>
 <p>SUPPORT those suffering from digestive disorders</p>	 <p>ENHANCE quality of life for those living with digestive disorders</p>

Request for support

The Canadian Digestive Health Foundation is a national charity governed by a volunteer board of directors. We rely on donations from the public and the generosity of our partners to develop and deliver our programs. Please consider including our Foundation as one of your chosen charities.

Contact us/Donate to

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