



Constipation

Look After Your
Insides

Your
Questions
Answered

What is Constipation?

This can be described as the irregular passage of stools (faeces) which may be hard and small, and cause pain. This tends to occur in people who have a low intake of fibre. It may also occur in people who persistently ignore the desire to go to the toilet or because of lack of exercise.

Normally a healthy person will have "regular" bowel movements. How often this occurs varies between each person but it may vary from three times per day to three times per week.

How does Fibre help?

Fibre is the part of food which your body cannot digest. A regular intake of fibre is important for healthy bowels. Fibre is found in foods such as wholegrain cereals, wholemeal bread, fruit, vegetables, salad, pulses, beans and peas.

As well as regular amounts of fibre in your food, you need to drink plenty of fluid, especially water 8-10 cups daily, to swell and to soften the fibre.

It is important to introduce fibre containing foods slowly, as they may cause flatulence and abdominal discomfort initially. Take at least a month to get used to these new foods. Too little fibre can lead to constipation or straining on the toilet. This maybe surprising to



you, because many people think that constipation is caused by eating too much. In fact, it is often caused by eating too little fibre. Our digestive system works much better if it contains a large bulk of soft fibre (sometimes called roughage). It helps to carry the rest of the body's waste easily down the long twisting intestine leading from your stomach. The diagram explains why.

Exercise is always helpful in the prevention of constipation. Try finding something you enjoy doing and do it regularly. This can be as simple as fitting more walking into your everyday routine.



- This small hard stool does not stretch the bowel muscles, which results in little or no muscle stimulation.
- Little or no muscle contraction occurs, resulting in a slow moving or unmoving stool.



- Large, soft smooth stool causes the bowel muscle to stretch leading to muscular stimulation.
- This causes muscle contraction which pushes the stool through the bowel.


Check your eating habits

Aim to establish a good eating pattern with three meals a day. If you need to eat in between meals, choose fresh fruit, wholemeal bread, wholegrain crackers, or wholegrain breakfast cereals.

Good sources of Fibre

- Wholegrain cereal, e.g. weetabix, branflakes or porridge.
- Wholemeal bread (wheatgerm, wheatmeal and standard brown loaves do not contain as much fibre. Check to make sure that 100% wholegrain is used.) Try high fibre white bread.
- Wholemeal flour for chapatti and cooking.
- Wholemeal pasta.
- Wholegrain rice.
- Wholemeal biscuits, crackers and oatcakes.
- All vegetables, including potatoes are good for you.



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- Salad.
 - Fruit: fresh, frozen and dried. Eat edible skins - much of the fibre is in there.
 - Try more pulses - peas, beans and lentils. These are filling, nutritious and cheap.

Breakfast

- Wholegrain cereal with milk - try adding chopped banana or other fruit.
- and/or wholemeal bread/toast with a little margarine or butter. Add baked beans/tomatoes for extra fibre.

Main Meal

- Lean meat or alternative (chicken, fish, egg, cheese, lentil or bean dish).
- Cooked or salad vegetables.
- Potatoes in their skin/brown rice/wholemeal pasta, or wholemeal chapatti.
- Fresh fruit or fruit based pudding.

Snack

- Lean meat or alternative (chicken, fish, egg, cheese, lentil or bean dish).
- Plenty of vegetables or salad.
- Wholemeal bread or chapatti with a little spread.
- Fresh fruit.

Fluids

Don't forget to have a good fluid intake at least 8-10 cups a day.

Still Constipated?

What happens if this doesn't work? In the majority of cases an increase in fibre - especially combined with the other measures suggested - will be sufficient to solve the problem of constipation. However, don't expect overnight success. It is best to allow several days, at least, for your food and lifestyle changes to take effect.

However, if you still feel constipated and, especially if you find blood in your stools, you should consult your doctor.

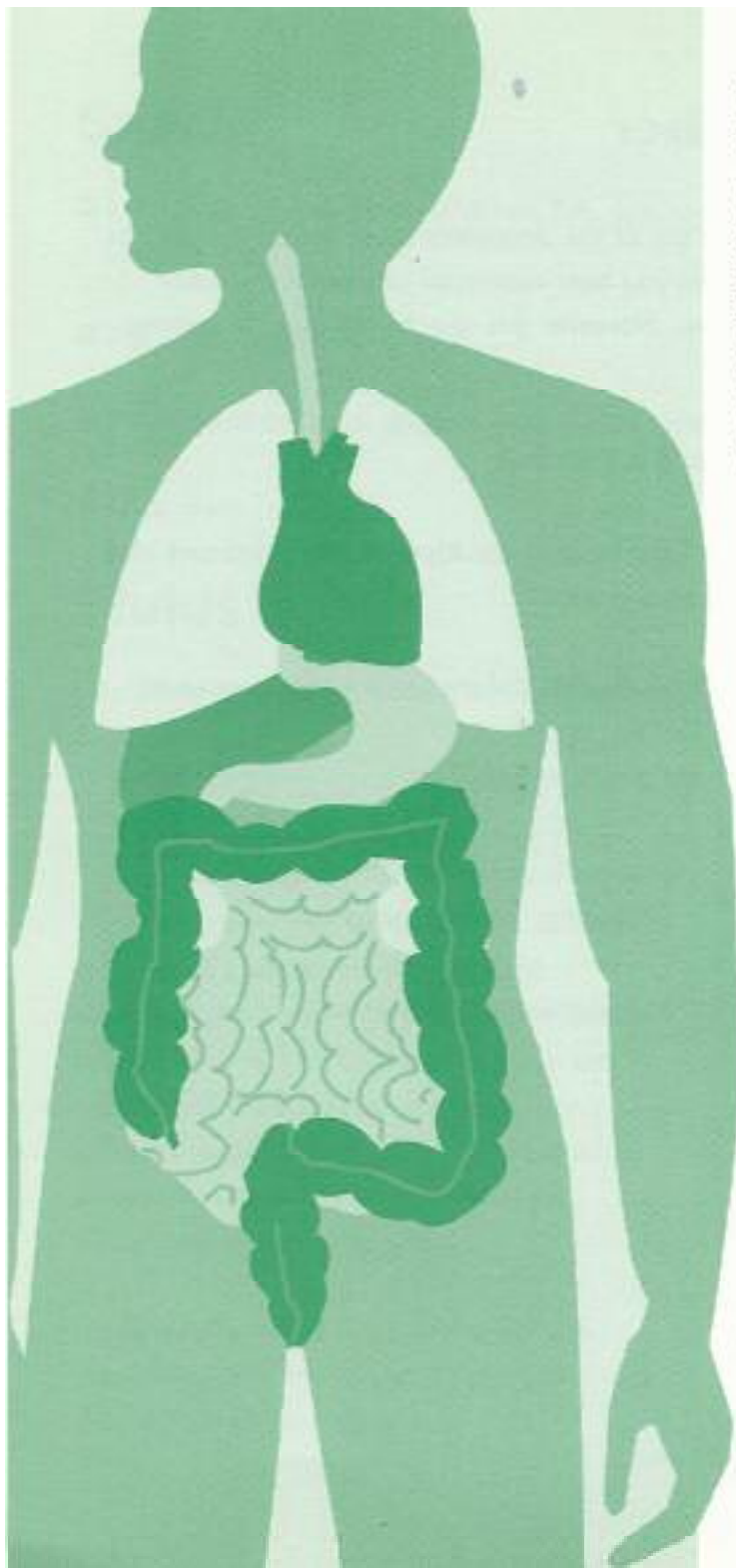




Remember

If you experience any of the symptoms listed below, it does not necessarily mean that you have colorectal cancer or any other serious health problem. However, you should not delay in seeking your doctor's advice.

- Blood in the stool.
- Diarrhoea or constipation that continues after two weeks.
- Stools that are smaller in width than usual.
- Chronic fatigue.
- Stomach discomfort (bloating, fullness, cramping, frequent gas pains).
- Unexplainable weight loss.



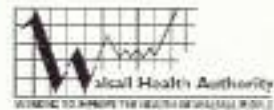
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