

Hope & Healing

Constipation Control

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

Introduction _____

What goes in must come out. Some food comes out as energy. The remainder is taken care of by sitting on the toilet.

Constipation is common. And it certainly is no fun. And the cause is often easy to find:

- Too little fiber in your diet.
- Too little water or other liquid intake.
- Stress.
- Medications.
- Lack of exercise.
- Bad bowel habits.

Is It Really Constipation? _____

The TV ads would have you believe that each of us must have a daily bowel movement to be healthy. Dr. Marvin Schuster, Chief of the Department of Digestive Diseases at Francis Scott Key Medical Center in Baltimore, says that it just isn't so.

Most Americans, he says, think they are constipated when they aren't, because they believe they must go every day.

Being regular varies greatly from one person to another. For some, a bowel movement five times a day is considered normal, for others three times a week is sufficient. In general, when the fiber intake is adequate, the bowel movements increase.

Are You Fiber Poor? _____

The first move in controlling constipation is to check your fiber and fluid intake.

Most of us don't get enough fiber in our diets. The American Dietetic Association recommends that everyone eat 20 to 35 grams of fiber daily. If you suffer from constipation your minimum fiber intake should be 30 grams daily, as the Association recommends.

Fiber is the complex carbohydrates of whole grain cereals, fruits, and vegetables.

Note this: It's not difficult to get 30 grams in your daily diet if you choose foods carefully.

Caution: Increase your fiber intake slowly to avoid gas and bloating.

The Fiber Heavyweights: _____

Here is a list of high fiber foods.

- Bran cereals
- Cooked dried beans
- Prunes
- Figs
- Raisins
- Popcorn
- Oatmeal
- Pears
- Nuts
- Carrots

For example, one small apple can supply 3 grams, a bowl of bran cereal about 13 grams, and one-half cup of green peas contains 5 grams.

Are You Fluid Deprived? _____

Lots of fiber and fluid are essential in keeping the stool soft and fluffy which helps it pass through the colon without straining.

How much fluid is enough? The American Dietetic Association recommends a minimum of 6 glasses of liquid and preferably 8 as a daily requirement for every adult. While any fluid will do the trick, the best is water.

Does Exercise Move You? _____

Exercise conditions the heart, a fact well known. In the bowel, exercise helps control constipation by moving food through the bowel faster.

Any form of exercise will help, but the one mentioned most often is walking. Walking is especially beneficial during pregnancy, a time when the inner workings are modified to accommodate the growing baby.

So, to answer the question, yes, regular exercise will help move you.

Other Tips to Control Constipation

Toilet Training. Eating a meal triggers a reflex to move the bowels. This is the call of nature. What we most often listen to, however, is the call of convenience, which, if it delays the urge, leads to constipation.

So, if you need retraining, pick any meal, the same each day, and following the meal, sit on the toilet for 10 minutes until your bowel is conditioned to act as nature intended.

Reconsider laxatives. Laxatives do what they claim they will do but they are

terribly addicting. Your bowel gets used to them and depends on them. Avoid bottled laxatives that are chemicals that move the bowels by irritating them.

All laxatives are not the same. Psyllium-based laxatives, like Metamucil and Konsyl, are superconcentrated forms of fiber that are safe and nonaddictive even over long periods. They must be taken as instructed which is with sufficient water to avoid gumming up inside you. But, they are expensive.

Review your medications. Many medicines can bring on or worsen constipation: antacids containing aluminum or calcium, cholesterol drugs, anti-Parkinson drugs, calcium supplements, diuretics, narcotics, sedatives, tranquilizers and antidepressants.

Take it easy. Tension, stress, anxiety and worry tend to slow the bowel as a part of the fight-or-flight reaction. If you believe stress is causing your constipation, take time to learn to relax by listening to relaxation tapes.

Get fast relief. Once in a while, if you're really miserable, nothing will work faster than an enema or a suppository. For occasional use they are perfectly all right. Used too often, however, they risk creating a lazy colon, just like the regular use of laxative pills.

Note carefully Use only clear water or a salt solution as an enema (1 teaspoon salt to a pint of water), not soapsuds. And if a suppository is your choice, try glycerine.

Check out gas formers. Milk, for instance, causes constipation in some persons and diarrhea in others. And persons with irritable bowel syndrome may have lots of gas and bloat when they eat beans, cauliflower and cabbage.

The small meal strategy. If you have irritable bowel syndrome, you may find that eating small meals will help you avoid bloating and gas.

Be cautious with herbs. Aloe juice, senna, medicinal rhubarb, cascara sagrada, dandelion root and plantain root and many other herbal remedies abound. Some work, but they can also cause laxative habit if used instead of fiber and fluids.

Don't strain. You can't huff and puff your way out of constipation. Avoid hemorrhoids and tears in the anus from hard stool (fissures).

Straining also raises the blood pressure and lowers your heart rate, sometimes to the point where an older person blacks out and risks injury if he or she falls from the toilet.

Medical Caution _____

When to see your doctor. Most constipation isn't caused by serious underlying medical conditions. However, when you have had normal bowel actions and suddenly have severe constipation, lasting three weeks or longer, or if you see blood in your stool, or if your belly gets distended and you're constipated or you lose weight, see your doctor.

Summary _____

Constipation control is a mixture of common sense, having good bowel habits, choosing foods with high fiber content, exercising regularly, and drinking plenty water. There's nothing too hard in that and certainly nothing too costly.

Awaken the Miracles Within You

The Miracle of Living For Today

The load of tomorrow, added to that of yesterday, carried today, makes even the strongest person stumble.

Many years ago an ancient philosopher wrote: "Look well to this day, for it and it alone is life. In the brief course of this one day lie all the truths and realities of your existence; The pride of growth, the glory of action; the splendor of beauty. Yesterday is only a dream and tomorrow is but a vision. Yet each day, well lived, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and each tomorrow is but a vision of hope. Look well, therefore, to this one day, for it and it alone is life."

The writer reminds us of the truth and reality of life, a miracle in itself. We are reminded to rise above the petty and trivial, seeking what will bring strength and peace of mind. And we are reminded that today is the day to move forward toward our fulfillment as persons by reaffirming our belief in the Lord. Today, right now, is all the life you have.

The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.