



Loving Arms
Elder Care

DIGESTIVE HEALTH

Constipation and irregularity are among seniors' top complaints for many reasons. It can make you feel miserable, and leads to problems like hemorrhoids, anal fissures or even intestinal blockages.

There are many reasons why seniors may be more prone to constipation.

- Diets lacking fresh fruits and vegetables
- Less active lifestyles
- Prescription medications that can cause constipation as a side effect
- Hurried eating - improper chewing of food puts undue strain on the stomach
- Lactose intolerance - milk sugar is not thoroughly broken down in the small intestine and arrives in the colon intact.
- Gluten sensitivity - the small intestine reacts against gluten proteins found in wheat, rye, barley, and oats.



Your digestive system is vital to your health. It processes the food you take in, absorbs the nutrients and energy your body needs and eliminates the waste that you don't need.

Healthy adults normally move their bowels every day or two, but that can vary widely from person to person. Some people move their bowels two or three times a day and some people regularly go for several days without a bowel movement, and that doesn't necessarily mean anything is wrong. However, if you don't have a bowel movement for several days and you feel bloated or uncomfortable you may be constipated. If your stool is very hard and you have to strain a lot in order to move your bowels, or if bowel movements are painful, that is not normal.

There are some relatively simple ways that constipation can be controlled:

- Drink plenty of water.
- Limit liquids that have diuretic properties--caffeinated drinks as well alcoholic beverages.
- Eat plenty of fiber, including whole grains, fresh fruits, and vegetables.
- Limit foods that may contribute to constipation - lots of meat and dairy products, especially cheese.
- Get regular exercise if possible - moderate physical exercise at least four times a week.
- Listen to your body - when you feel a bowel movement coming on, go to the bathroom as soon as you can.
- Don't skip meals.
- Gently massaging the abdomen on a regular basis can help stimulate bowel movements.
- Train the bowels by sitting on the toilet at a specific time everyday.

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There are also several food-based folk remedies that may help relieve occasional constipation.

- Apples or apple juice
- Carrots or carrot juice
- Rhubarb
- Persimmons
- Hot tea with one tablespoon of honey or molasses
- Hot broth
- Tablespoon of olive oil in the morning and evening
- Spinach juice
- Sunflower seeds
- Pitted dates soaked in hot water



If you regularly struggle with constipation, or if you have a one-time severe case of constipation, talk to your doctor. Remember, what's normal for one person may not be normal for another. Your digestive system is unique and behaves according to your body makeup, daily habits, and lifestyle, so rather than focusing on a particular number, focus on what's regular for you most of the time.