

## Constipation

### WHAT IS CONSTIPATION?

In contrast to diarrhoea, constipation corresponds to **hard stools that are less frequent and less voluminous than usual**. It leads to a delay or even problems with expelling stools. The frequency of evacuation of stools varies from one person to another, but it roughly ranges from three times per day to three times per week. Constipation occurs when the frequency is less than three times per week.

### WHAT ARE THE CAUSES?

Among some of the causes of constipation, the first is **poor eating habits** that produce stools with a low water or fibre content. **Not getting enough exercise** or taking **certain medication** (such as anti-inflammatories), may slow down peristalsis in the digestive tract. Muscle contractions are not able to move food residues fast enough, causing stools to stay in the colon too long. This is where the body reabsorbs a lot of water so, the stools then become hard and difficult to pass.

As with diarrhoea, **intense emotions** such as anxiety or stress can also trigger constipation. Sometimes, the anal sphincter (which is the muscle of the anus) contracts instead of relaxing. In doing so, it prevents stools from being expelled and they accumulate in the rectum instead. The reasons are often related to **psychological factors**. Diarrhoea phobia is the fear of having urgent diarrhoea attacks and not being able to hold things in before finding a toilet. This fear can delay and even stop defaecation.

## Constipation

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In cases of constipation, stools are...

- less frequent than usual
- as frequent as usual
- more frequent than usual

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Constipation is the appropriate term if the frequency of passing stools is...

- less than three times per week
- less than ten times per week
- more than three times per week

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Constipation means passing stools is generally...

- more difficult
- easier
- as usual

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Medications such as anti-inflammatories may cause...

- diarrhoea
- constipation
- headaches

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Eating a high-fibre diet and drinking plenty of water can cause constipation.

- False
- True

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Lack of physical activity can cause constipation.

- False
- True

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Anti-inflammatory medication may...

- cause diarrhoea
- reduce peristalsis
- accelerate digestion

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Strong feelings do not cause constipation.

- True
- False

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When faecal matter stays in the colon for too long, it becomes too...

- hard
- liquid
- soft

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Diarrhoea phobia can actually cause diarrhoea.

- False
- True

## Answers

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### In cases of constipation, stools are...

- less frequent than usual**  
*Well done! If you are constipated, stools are also harder and not as voluminous.*
- as frequent as usual**  
*Wrong! That is not the case.*
- more frequent than usual**  
*Wrong! More frequent bowel movements can be a sign of diarrhoea.*

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### Constipation is the appropriate term if the frequency of passing stools is...

- less than three times per week**  
*Well done! That's right!*
- less than ten times per week**  
*Wrong! It's much less!*
- more than three times per week**  
*Wrong! That's not the correct answer.*

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### Constipation means passing stools is generally...

- more difficult**  
*Well done! Stools are harder and this makes them more difficult to pass.*
- easier**  
*Wrong! That's not the right answer.*
- as usual**  
*Wrong! Try again!*

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### Medications such as anti-inflammatories may cause...

- diarrhoea**  
*Wrong! Try again!*
- constipation**  
*Well done! Anti-inflammatories can reduce the peristaltic motion of the intestines. Food remains in the colon for a longer time and more water is absorbed.*
- headaches**  
*Wrong! Anti-inflammatories generally cure headaches.*

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### Eating a high-fibre diet and drinking plenty of water can cause constipation.

- False**  
*Well done! On the contrary, food with a high water or fibre content promotes intestinal transit.*
- True**  
*Wrong! Try again!*

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### Lack of physical activity can cause constipation.

- False**  
*Wrong! Try again!*
- True**  
*Well done! Physical activity encourages peristaltic motion in your digestive tract and therefore bowel transit.*

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### Anti-inflammatory medication may...

- cause diarrhoea**  
*Wrong! Anti-inflammatories can have the opposite effect. They may cause constipation.*
- reduce peristalsis**  
*Well done! That's right!*
- accelerate digestion**  
*Wrong! Try again!*

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### Strong feelings do not cause constipation.

- True**  
*Wrong! That's not the correct answer!*
- False**  
*Well done! Tension from anxiety or stress, for example, may cause constipation.*

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### When faecal matter stays in the colon for too long, it becomes too...

- hard**  
*Well done! As the transit takes longer, more water is absorbed and stools become harder.*
- liquid**  
*Wrong! Try again!*
- soft**  
*Wrong! That's not the right answer.*

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### Diarrhoea phobia can actually cause diarrhoea.

- False**  
*Well done! This is an exaggerated fear of having diarrhoea and can actually delay, or even block, defecation.*
- True**  
*Wrong! This is not the case.*