

Constipation often gets better on its own, but if you can't pass stool for several days, you have pain or bleeding, or your constipation turns into a recurrent problem, it's time to seek help from the board-certified gastroenterologists at Pioneer GI Clinic. They determine the underlying cause and provide personalized treatment that relieves your constipation and prevents future problems. To schedule an appointment, call the office in Anchorage, Alaska.

## **What is constipation?**

Though constipation generally means having fewer than three bowel movements a week, everyone has different habits. Some people go to the bathroom daily, while others may only have a few bowel movements every week. As a result, constipation occurs when you have fewer bowel movements than normal or you have symptoms such as:

- Hard, dry stools
- Pain during bowel movements
- Difficulty having a bowel movement
- Straining to have a bowel movement
- Feeling like you can't empty your bowels

You may also experience abdominal bloating and cramping.

## **What causes constipation?**

Constipation frequently develops when you don't get enough dietary fiber and fluids. Fiber keeps your stools bulky and soft, helping them move through your gastrointestinal tract. You also need fluids to keep stools soft.

Some medications contribute to constipation. For example, opioids cause constipation as they slow down the muscle contractions needed to push stool through the colon.

Several health conditions, such as Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, and other forms of irritable bowel syndrome, also lead to constipation. Among other conditions are:

- Blocked colon
- Underactive thyroid gland
- Neurological conditions
- Uncontrolled diabetes

Of the many underlying conditions, the most common include irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and IBD.

## **When should I seek medical care for constipation?**

Any time your bowel habits change, you should schedule an exam to rule out serious conditions like colon cancer.

You should also seek medical care when you have any of the following symptoms along with constipation:

- Fever
- Vomiting
- Black or bloody stool
- Rectal bleeding
- Inability to pass gas
- Bloating, rigid abdomen
- Severe abdominal pain
- Breathing problems or fainting

Without treatment, ongoing constipation causes problems such as impacted stool, anal fissures, and hemorrhoids.

## **How is constipation treated?**

The treatment you need depends on the duration and severity of your constipation. Your provider may recommend any of the following:

### *Dietary changes*

Many people can treat constipation and prevent future problems by increasing their fluid and fiber consumption. Good sources of fiber include high-fiber cereals, whole grains, beans, vegetables, and fruits.

### *Laxatives, stool softeners, and bulking agents*

Laxatives, stool softeners, and bulking agents promote bowel movements, but each one works differently. Your provider can recommend the one that will work best for you.

### *Medications*

Your provider may prescribe medications that pull water into your stool or help stool move through the large intestine. You may also need medications that reverse the impact of opioids on your colon.

### *Enemas and suppositories*

An enema softens stool with water, while suppositories contain ingredients that achieve the same goal. You may need an enema if you have impacted stool.

If you need help with constipation, call Pioneer GI Clinic