

# Chronic Constipation

Summertime has arrived. This time of year is synonymous with side walk cafes, traveling, and weekend barbecues. But with the changing of the seasons comes alterations in routine and sweltering temperatures. Unfortunately these changes can negatively affect bowel function by causing dehydration, poor diet choices, and decreased activity levels.

Constipation is one of the most commonly reported gastrointestinal disorders affecting between 2% to 30% of adults. It is characterized as having fewer than three bowel movements per week and hard, dry stools that are difficult to eliminate. Some people who are constipated have painful bowel movements and experience straining, bloating, and the sensation of incomplete evacuation.

Constipation can cause discomfort and sluggishness, keeping you from enjoying the summertime activities

for which we wait all year. The most common causes of constipation are not enough fiber in the diet, not enough liquids, a lack of physical activity, and changes in life or routine. Other causes include side effects from medications, abuse of laxatives, irritable bowel syndrome, neurological disease, or problems with the colon, rectum or intestinal function. In most cases, dietary or lifestyle changes can help eliminate constipation and prevent it from reoccurring.

Increasing your daily fiber intake to the recommended 25 to 35 grams a day helps form bulkier stools which are easier to pass. High fiber foods include beans, whole grain breads and cereals, fresh fruits, and vegetables such as cabbage, spinach, and celery. Increasing your daily fluid intake by drinking plenty of water and other fluids can help prevent dehydration. Other healthy habits

include eating similar-sized meals at the same time each day, not ignoring the urge to have a bowel movement, and reserving enough time after each meal to have a bowel movement. In addition, engaging in daily exercise can help speed digestion and regulate your bowels.

Chronic constipation not treatable with dietary and lifestyle changes may be due to the failure to relax the pelvic floor muscles during defecation, impeding the outflow of feces. This condition is called pelvic floor dyssynergia. It is often unresponsive to laxatives, suppositories, enemas, and increased fluid and fiber intake. Physicians, such as gastroenterologists or colorectal surgeons, can help rule out and treat underlying medical con-

ditions and prescribe medications to alleviate symptoms. A physical therapist specializing in pelvic floor dysfunction, can help retrain the pelvic floor muscles to decrease straining during bowel movements.

Constipation affects most people at one time or another throughout their lifespan. Eating a well-balanced, fiber-rich diet, drinking plenty of liquids, exercising regularly, and setting aside time after meals for undisturbed visits to the toilet can help alleviate symptoms. If these guidelines do not improve your symptoms, you may suffer from pelvic floor dyssynergia. This condition is treatable by a physical therapist that specializes in pelvic floor dysfunction.

**We are moving in June.  
Check out our new location!**



12505 Hymeadow Drive  
Building 2 Suite 2B  
Austin, Texas 78750

**CONFIDENTIAL**