

## Chronic Constipation

### What Is Constipation?

Chronic constipation is infrequent bowel movements or difficult passage of stools that persists for several weeks or longer. Constipation is generally categorized as having fewer than three bowel movements a week. Although occasional constipation is very common, some people experience chronic constipation that interferes with their ability to go about their daily tasks.



### What Causes Constipation?

Constipation most commonly occurs when waste or stool moves too slowly through the digestive tract causing the stool to become hard and dry, which makes it difficult to be eliminated effectively from the rectum. Possible causes include: blockages in the colon or rectum; problems with the nerves around the colon and rectum; difficulty with the muscles involved in elimination, medication or hormonal imbalance.

### What Are The Symptoms Of Constipation?

Signs and symptoms of chronic constipation include:

- Passing fewer than three stools a week

- Having lumpy or hard stools
- Straining to have bowel movements
- Feeling as though there is a blockage in your rectum that prevents bowel movements
- Feeling as though you cannot completely empty all the stool from your rectum

Constipation is usually considered chronic if experiencing two or more of these symptoms over the past three months.

### How Is Constipation Evaluated?

In addition to a general physical exam, gastroenterologist can use a number of tests and procedures to evaluate chronic constipation. These include blood tests for a systemic illness, radiologic studies,

colonoscopy, and evaluations of anal rectal motility. These tests and procedures will help to pinpoint the cause of the chronic constipation.

### What Treatments Are Available?

Treatment for chronic constipation usually begins with diet and lifestyle changes, designed to increase the speed at which stool moves through the intestines. The gastroenterologist may recommend increasing water and fiber intake, exercising more, and not delaying going to the bathroom when the urge to have a bowel movement occurs. There are multiple types of laxatives and prescription medications that can help to produce a bowel movement. Treatments can be discussed with your gastroenterologist.

Patient Centered Care Of Digestive Disorders

Additional patient information about digestive health topics available online at [www.PAGIconsultants.com](http://www.PAGIconsultants.com).

