

Constipation

Constipation is defined as having hard stool or no stool from your bowel program for two days in a row. It can lead to impaction and maybe dysreflexia in persons with spinal cord injury above the T6 level. This lesson will review causes, symptoms, treatments and prevention for constipation.

Causes

- Not enough fiber in the diet (fruits, vegetables, whole grain breads, cereals)
- Not doing the bowel program on time or correctly
- Not emptying the bowel completely
- Not exercising
- Changing the time of the bowel program
- Certain foods like dairy, fatty or fried meals
- Not enough water in the diet

Signs

- Very hard stool or no stool from your bowel program for 2 days in a row
- Hard, tight or bloated abdomen
- Poor or no appetite
- Small amounts of blood in the stool

Treatment

For persons having small amounts or hard stool from the bowel program:

- Drink 1 to 2 cups of hot liquid like coffee or tea 30 minutes before the bowel program.
- Continue to drink 6 to 8 glasses of water.
- Eat more foods with fiber and less fatty/fried foods.
- Fruits, vegetables & whole grains are great food choices.

If there has not been any stool for more than two days:

- Try adding one stool softener to your program. This is may be taken once a day.
- You may increase your dose to one capsule twice a day if you are already taking one stool softener.

On the third day:

Try using a rectal suppository such as Dulcolax or a Magic Bullet 30 minutes before the bowel program. If a suppository is already part of the program, go to the next treatment.

Try taking a mild laxative such as one Dulcolax tablet 6 hours before your next bowel program.

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If you are still not having results, on day 4:

Try your regular bowel program. If there are no results, use an enema such as a Fleet or a soap suds enema.

Do not go more than four days without having a bowel movement. If you have not had a bowel movement in four days, call the doctor (see chapter on Impaction).

Prevention

- Eat fiber foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals
- Drink 6-8 glasses of water each day
- Do the bowel program on time and do it right
- Use a stool softener as ordered by the doctor.
- Stay on an exercise program!