

Constipation

Constipation is the passing of hard, dry stools; it can cause pain, cramping, a bloated abdomen, and reduced appetite for food and drink due to discomfort.

Constipation is common for many people, but for individuals with physical disabilities – and particularly those with more severe physical problems – it can be a long-term, recurring problem due to:

- Poor fluid or fibre intake
- Poor muscle tone
- Reduced movement in the stomach and surrounding organs
- Lack of overall bodily movement
- Some medications

There are some simple steps that can assist in preventing constipation:

- Increased fibre intake – at least 30g per day of high-fibre foods such as porridge, wholemeal bread, fruit and vegetables.
- Increased fluid intake – between 6 and 8 cups (about 250ml per cup) per day of fluid is recommended, including includes water, fruit juices, cordial, smoothies, tea, coffee and whole fruit.

- Exercise – physical activity can assist in promoting good movement of the stomach and intestine.
- Standing – holding the body in an upright position can assist the movement of the stomach and intestines
- Medications – in some cases medication may be required to ease constipation.

Dietitians can assist in identifying food and drinks that will help to prevent constipation. The Australia Government's Eat for Health website also provides advice and information on increasing fibre intake and maintaining a healthy diet. To learn more visit eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines

Physiotherapists can also provide assistance with constipation, through recommendations for physical movements, standing programs and massage.



See your GP for advice on long-term management of constipation. Medication prescribed for constipation should be reviewed regularly, and laxatives only used when other methods do not provide relief.

Visit futurethinking.abilitycentre.com.au for more information.