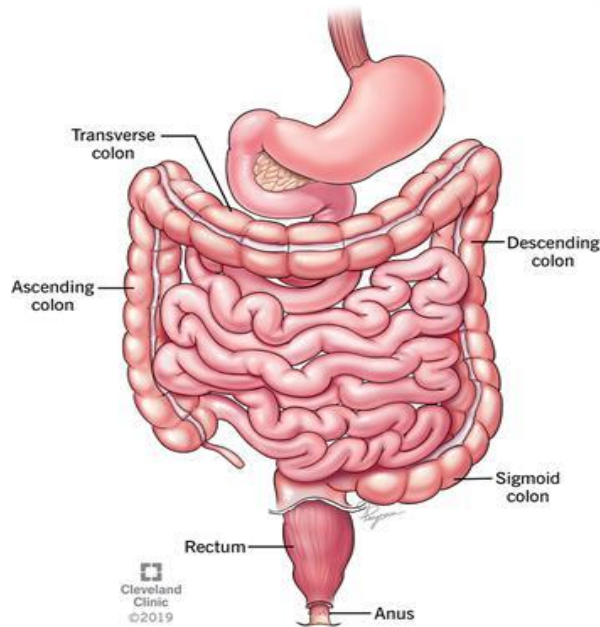


CONSTIPATION



Having fewer than three bowel movements a week is, technically, the definition of constipation. However, how often you “go” varies widely from person to person. Some people have bowel movements several times a day while others have them only one to two times a week. Whatever your bowel movement pattern is, it’s unique and normal for you – as long as you don’t stray too far from your pattern.

key features that usually define constipation include:

- Your stools are dry and hard.
- Your bowel movement is painful and stools are difficult to pass.
- You have a feeling that you have not fully emptied your bowels.

Causes

Constipation most commonly occurs when waste or stool moves too slowly through the digestive tract or cannot be eliminated effectively from the rectum, which may cause the stool to become hard and dry. Chronic constipation has many possible causes.

Symptoms

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's a blockage in your rectum that prevents bowel movements
- Feeling as though you can't completely empty the stool from your rectum
- Needing help to empty your rectum, such as using your hands to press on your abdomen and using a finger to remove stool from your rectum

Constipation may be considered chronic if you've experienced two or more of these symptoms for the last three months.

Risk factors

Factors that may increase your risk of chronic constipation include:

- Being an older adult
- Being a woman
- Being dehydrated
- Eating a diet that's low in fiber
- Getting little or no physical activity
- Taking certain medications, including sedatives, opioid pain medications, some antidepressants or medications to lower blood pressure
- Having a mental health condition such as depression or an eating disorder

Complications

Complications of chronic constipation include:

- **Swollen veins in your anus (hemorrhoids).** Straining to have a bowel movement may cause swelling in the veins in and around your anus.
- **Torn skin in your anus (anal fissure).** A large or hard stool can cause tiny tears in the anus.
- **Stool that can't be expelled (fecal impaction).** Chronic constipation may cause an accumulation of hardened stool that gets stuck in your intestines.
- **Intestine that protrudes from the anus (rectal prolapse).** Straining to have a bowel movement can cause a small amount of the rectum to stretch and protrude from the anus.

Prevention

