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## **Constipation:**

A person's own knowledge about bowel movements is limited. We have our personal experience and that of our family (to some extent.) If you have children, then your experience is a bit broader, but still, this gives us only a limited range of experience.

Variations in bowel movement pattern, form, and color is commonplace and it is rather common for people to think that their bowel movement pattern is unusual or even a sign of serious health issues. Generally, this is not the case but rather is the result of the following that can alter bowel motility. This includes:

- Change in diet
- Lack of physical activity
- Travel
- Medication changes
- Medical conditions that develop

Bowel movement frequency and consistency will vary in most people. Although there are those 'lucky few' who are perfectly regular, moving their bowels daily and readily, most of us will have more variation than that. This is completely normal and should not be a cause for concern.

The normal range of bowel movements is anywhere from 4 times per day to once every 5 days. That is considered 'within the normal range'.

When your bowel movements become less frequent you may feel bloated, full, and uncomfortable. To resolve this there are several ways to go, and I will list them below, starting with dietary changes as the first effort, and then listing all the various supplements, over the counter medications, and then even prescription meds. I will list then in sequential order, going from the milder ways to assisting with bowel movements, to the more aggressive.

It is normal to use the more advanced methods on rare occasion, but it is best to not become habitual with these efforts daily, or you will become dependent on such treatments to move the bowels regularly. Of course, if you have chronic constipation or are on medications that can chronically slow down the bowels, then you may need to use various methods on daily basis.... this is acceptable.

### Diet Changes:

Increasing fiber in the diet is the first step to help with mild constipation and helps prevent ongoing issues that can recur. It is recommended that our diet have 25grams of fiber in it daily, but most of us get less than half of that routinely.

Please see the DIET FOR HIGH FIBER on Page???

### Lifestyle Changes:

- Increase physical activity
- More Liquid
  - If you are having constipation, then ingesting more liquids makes sense. Increase an additional 16 oz (2 cups) more than your usual liquid intake to make certain you are not developing dehydration.
- Look at Medications and Supplements:
  - Although constipation can be caused by any medication, some are more common causes of constipation than others. Generally, medications are not the 'major' cause of constipation, but they should be considered or adjusted. The list of generally constipation supplements and medications include:
    - Iron tablets
    - Calcium supplements or antacids with calcium (ROLAIDS, TUMS)
    - Pain medications (Narcotics)
    - Antidepressants (amitriptyline/nortriptyline can cause issue— Prozac, Zoloft, Celexa do not generally cause constipation)
    - Blood pressure medications (Norvasc, Verapamil)
    - Parkinson's disease medications

### TREATMENT:

Medications and supplements for constipation are listed below in progressive levels of effect and strength.

Each person's response to medications for constipation is unique, but there are some approaches that are milder than others.

Fiber Supplements (also termed Bulk-forming laxatives)  
(Mild and OK for ongoing chronic use if needed)

Fiber increases the bulk of the bowel movement and enhances the amount of fluid in the bowel. By doing this, it makes it easier for the bowel movement to move through the colon.

To increase the fiber content beyond what is readily available in foods, many people use fiber supplements. These are commonplace and known to all of us. The various supplements have different sources of fiber and thus provide different amounts of fiber. This includes:

- Bran Fiber
- Psyllium Husk
- Metamucil (Psyllium based)
- Citrucel (Methylcellulose)
- Fibercon (polycarbophil)
- Benefiber (guar gum)

#### Stool Softeners:

(Mild and OK for ongoing chronic use if needed.)

Colace/Surfak (docusate sodium) enhance the amount of liquid that remains in the bowel movement. By doing this, it makes the bowel movement easier and quicker.

Dosing: 100mg pills....1-2 per day

#### Osmotic Agents:

(Mild/Moderate...OK for ongoing use if needed)

MiraLAX is a powder that dissolves in any liquid. Made of PEG (Polyethylene glycol) it is essentially just a small amount of the same substance used in bulk for preparing you for colonoscopy. Taken in small amounts, regularly, it will draw more water in the bowel movements and quicken the pace of BM.

#### Stimulants:

(Moderate.... OK for short term use. May be appropriate for ongoing use but only if given the 'go ahead' by the doctor)

These medications act as irritants to the bowel and cause contraction of the muscles within the bowels, moving the bowel movement along more rapidly.

These medications include:

Sennakot.

Senna teas

Dulcolax (pills and suppositories)

#### Osmotic Agents:

Moderate/Strong...OK for short term use. Only used chronically for severe underlying issues that require ongoing treatment and only acceptable when OK'd by a physician.)

Milk of Magnesia or Magnesium Oxide pills use the properties of Magnesium salts to draw large quantities of fluid into the intestines and create rapid movement of the bowel through the colon.