

Introduction:

Everything You Wanted To Know About

Constipation But Were Afraid To Ask

Excerpt From Chapter One Of Why Can't I Go?

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Constipation Is the Last Taboo

Nobody wants to talk about the “C” word - that is, constipation. People can talk about unusual sexual acts on mid-afternoon television, but no one will talk about constipation. In our society it is considered impolite to talk about your bowel function. This means that if you experience constipation and its relative - bloating, abdominal pain, straining, rectal pain and pelvic pressure - you probably suffer in silence. You may be embarrassed to mention it to your friends or family and even your physicians. If you do mention your bowel trouble to your doctor, you are usually put off with instructions to eat more salads and fiber. As frustrating as this advice from your doctor may be, it is not really his or her fault. Most doctors receive little or no education on constipation during medical school, internship or residency.

What is Constipation?

The American Heritage Dictionary defines constipation as difficult, incomplete or infrequent evacuation of the bowels. This definition encompasses a number of complaints, including painful bowel movements, straining, hard stools or the need to use manual maneuvers.

Doctors define constipation as:

Less than three bowel movements per week.

Having to strain to move your bowels more than 25% of the time.

Having painful bowel movements more than 25% of the time.

Having to use your fingers or hands to help move your bowels.

Scientific studies and investigational trials define constipation with even more precise criteria. A multinational consensus (Rome II: The Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders) has established the following diagnostic criteria. For at least 12 weeks (not necessarily consecutive) in the preceding 12 months a person must have experienced two or more of the following symptoms:

1. Straining for more than 25% of bowel movements;

2. Lumpy or hard stools with more than 25% of bowel movements;
3. Sensations of not emptying completely in more than 25% of bowel movements;
4. Sensation of anorectal obstruction or blockage in more than 25% of bowel movements;
- 5: Manual maneuvers (using your hand) to help empty rectum;
6. Less than three bowel movements per week.

In addition, loose stools are not present unless a laxative has been taken. In common language, constipation is difficult, painful or infrequent bowel movements. The normal frequency of bowel movements is from three times per day to three times per week. If more than three days pass between your bowel movements, the intestinal contents usually harden, and hard stools are difficult and painful to pass. It's important to know, however, that it is not necessary to move your bowels every day. And even if waste products stay in your intestines for longer than three days, they will not harm you or cause cancer.