

Chronic Constipation: Cause & Natural Cure

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1. WHAT IS CONSTIPATION?

Constipation is a new epidemic of modern urban populations who eat highly refined, unnatural factory-made foods deficient in fiber and live unbalanced lifestyles such as late eating, multiple meals, poor sleeping habits, and lack of mobility and exercise. Constipation is also more common in individuals who suffer from food and lifestyle diseases (Obesity, Type 2 diabetes, High Blood Pressure, and Heart disease, and take multiple medications. All these factors cause Constipation by disrupting digestion as well as intestinal movement and activity.

Constipation can present in many different ways:

- 1. Inability to have a regular bowel movement (once daily or less than 3-4 times/week).**
- 2. Hard dry and lumpy stools.**
- 3. A feeling of straining during passing stools**
- 4. A sensation of incomplete evacuation**
- 5. Lack of natural urge for a bowel movement**

To label constipation a chronic problem, the person must have any of the above symptoms for 3-6 months. Keep in mind that it is not only the frequency but the stools' texture (hard) that is important to define Constipation.

2. WHY DOES CONSTIPATION OCCUR (CAUSES)?

Constipation may result from medical problems or food and lifestyle irregularities. The most common cause of Constipation in the modern urban population is food and lifestyle irregularities.

A. *Non-medical causes of Constipation*—The food and lifestyle irregularities that can cause chronic Constipation include:

- ***Low fiber or refined food diet***- Such as a diet rich in refined wheat flour - milled packaged wheat flour and Maida, and a diet lacking in fresh produce- Vegetables and fruits, lentils, and legumes
- ***Dry foods rich in salt and sugar*** – The preprepared fast foods and junk foods are low in water content and rich in salt and sugar. The digestion of food requires up to 7-8 liters of digestive juices daily for keeping good digestion and normal stool consistency—the drier the food more the Constipation.
- ***Not enough natural water intake***- The sugary drinks – sodas, sports drinks, vitamin waters, and fruit juices are replacing natural water as a drink amongst the city dwellers. The sugary drinks cause more water loss from the body via urine, producing a state of persistent dehydration. Excessive sugar also is the culprit behind Obesity and Type 2 diabetes.
- ***Excessive dairy (Milk and dense Milk product) consumption***- Contrary to popular belief, milk is constipating—the dense milk products such as Cheese, Paneer, and milk-based sweets are even worse. The reason people feel that milk is working as a laxative for them is because poorly digested lactose sugar in the milk is acidic and irritating for intestines. So the milk increases the urge to defecate, but the bowel's evacuation is incomplete and unsatisfactory. The most adult Asian population is deficient in the enzyme lactase, which digests the lactose sugar in milk. Lactase deficiency is the reason why many people get flatulence, bloating, indigestion, abdominal cramps, acidic stools, and the urge to evacuate the bowel but the inability to do that.

- ***Immobility and Inactivity***—Muscles of the intestine move in harmony with the muscles of the body. The sedentary lifestyle goes hand in hand with Constipation. One to 2 glasses of water and a 20-minute brisk walk first thing in the morning will get your bowel going by the schedule.

2.MEDICAL CAUSES OF CONSTIPATION

Certain medical diseases and drugs can cause Constipation, so be aware and take precautionary measures early on.

- ***Pregnancy***—High level of the hormone progesterone can slow down intestinal muscles causing Constipation.
- ***Laxative abuse & Self-medication*** – This is a widespread cause of Chronic Constipation. Repeated use of laxatives such as Senna, Dulcolax, Miralax (polyethylene glycol), milk of Magnesia, and Ayurveda remedies such as Harad and Triphala causes weakening of intestinal muscles leading to chronic Constipation.
- ***Electrolyte Imbalance***- Hypercalcemia and hypomagnesemia from high dose calcium supplements and iron supplementation causes Constipation. Unfortunately, in India, doctors frequently prescribe very high doses of calcium (1000 mg or more/day) for bone thinning or osteoporosis. In western countries, calcium gets prescribed in far lower quantities of 500 mg/ day because these are the revised recommendations for calcium supplementation.
- ***Intestinal diseases***--Such as irritable bowel syndrome (characterized by alternating Constipation and diarrhea), bowel cancer, or narrowing of the intestines
- **Neurological diseases or diseases which weaken the nerves of the intestines- These include:**
 - Diabetes with neuropathy
 - Parkinsonism
 - Multiple sclerosis
 - Guillaume Barre disease

Stroke

- ***Hormonal imbalance***- Hypothyroidism
- Depression and anxiety disorders with a lack of deep sleep
- ***Drug-induced Constipation***- The allopathic drugs which can cause Constipation are:

Pain medications that have opium and Tramadol

Blood pressure medications (calcium channel blockers and beta-blockers)

Oral contraceptives

Antidepressant, antianxiety, and sleep drugs

3. WHO IS MORE LIKELY TO DEVELOP CONSTIPATION?

In the absence of a specific medical condition, the people who are more likely to get chronic Constipation are:

- Older population over the age of 65 years
- Women are twice as likely to get constipated when compared to men
- Constipation runs in families because families share similar foods and lifestyles.

4. COMPLICATIONS OF CHRONIC CONSTIPATION

Long-standing constipation results in impaction of hard stools in the rectum (stool storage organ between the large intestine and the anus), which leads to several problems, including:

a). Fecal incontinence (stool leakage from the anus without any warning) is the most distressing complication of chronic Constipation. Fortunately, getting rid of hard-impacted stool and treating Constipation with natural solutions eliminates this problem over a few weeks. When the rectum gets filled with dry solid fecal matter, it does not let the new fecal matter pass through. The new soft fecal matter then passes around the dry stool, and it passes through the anus without warning. Normally sensation to go for bowel movement arises

when the rectum gets stretched with feces. That warning process gets blunted because the rectum gets over distended with old dry hard feces.

Fecal incontinence is emotionally devastating because it causes embarrassment and affects the quality of life. It is more common in females as compared to males. Certain foods such as dairy, sweets, chocolates, caffeine, alcohol, spicy and fried food aggravate the leakage problem.

b). Hemorrhoids or Piles—Straining on the stools causes swelling of the veins around the anus. When Constipation is chronic, the veins become permanently distended, and these distended veins become hemorrhoids. These can bleed or get infected and can become painful.

c). Anal fissure- Straining and passage of dry stools can tear the anal lining called the fissure. The fissure is a painful condition that further aggravates Constipation. It can get infected, giving rise to abscess formation, which requires immediate surgical attention.

d). Hernia and organ prolapse- When straining on stools becomes a daily problem, a person can develop hernia and prolapse of the vagina, rectum, and even uterus.

5. MANAGEMENT OF CHRONIC CONSTIPATION

The five common causes of chronic Constipation are:

- Low fiber diet
- Persistent dehydration
- Lack of mobility and exercise (abdominal core exercises- Kapalbhathi is a good Pranayam and Vajrasana a good asana for Constipation)
- Poor toilet habits.
- Laxative overuse

MANAGEMENT PLAN :

1. *Stop all the laxatives as the first step*— That includes Senna, Miralax. Dulcolax, Milk of Magnesia, Harad, and Triphala, etc. Most of these drugs cause

irritation and weakness of intestinal muscles and are only temporary fixes, are addicting, and not a permanent natural cure

2. ***Get rid of impacted hard, and dry stools from the rectum-*** This allows the rectum to regain its muscle strength and regular size for proper function. The impacted dry fecal matter may take few days to few weeks to clear, depending on Constipation duration. Fecal incontinence or leakage of fecal matter from the anus without warning suggests that the problem is severe and must be dealt with urgently. The management strategy is as follows:

- ***Glycerine Enema*** – You can use Sulabh or Neotomic glycerine enema liquid preparations. These contain 15% glycerine with sodium chloride 15%-- 20 ml liquid per application. Drink one to two water glasses first thing in the morning before inserting the enema liquid. It will take the enema 30-60 minutes to work. Repeat the enema every other day for three or at the most four applications until you feel that all the hard fecal matter is cleared.

OR

- ***Castor Oil***—If you do not like enema, use castor oil by mouth to get rid of the dry fecal matter. Use cold compressed natural castor oil meant for Constipation and not the one meant for hair care. There are many commercial brands available for treating Constipation.

The best time to take castor oil is first thing in the morning. Take 15 milliliters (3 teaspoons or one tablespoon) of castor oil and mix it in a glass of warm water, drink it, and follow immediately with one more glass of warm water. It may take castor oil 1-5 hours to work, most likely 1-3 hours. As in the case of enema, repeat castor oil every other day for 3 to the most four times until all the dry fecal matter gets cleared.

Avoid the castor oil if you are on the following medications:

Diuretics (water Pill) for high blood pressure or heart condition

Antibiotics for infection, especially tetracyclines

Blood thinners

- You can use Glycerine enema or Castor oil once a week and no more frequently in the subsequent 3-4 weeks if you feel that problem of hard stools is persisting. However, a safer approach is to consume 2-3 teaspoons of Sesame or coconut oil every day with Khichari or lentil soup or vegetable soups to keep fecal matter soft and prevent it from sticking to the wall of the intestines.

3. Eliminate all the refined foods and switch to a natural high fiber diet

The refined foods to be excluded include:

- The refined wheat flour products that do not have the bran and germ- including milled wheat flour chapatis, food preparations made from maida (bleached white flour) such as white bread, cakes, pastries, pizzas, pasta, and noodles.
- The refined sugar products- sweets, sugary beverages, and fruit juices
- Refined oils- All the oils made in the factories (Canola, Saffola/ Sunflower, vegetable, Corn, peanut, and cooking olive oil sold in big containers). Eat only cold compressed natural oils for cooking, such as Mustard, Sesame, and Coconut oils, with 2-3 teaspoons of cow ghee (preferably A2 Ghee).
- Minimize milk, specifically dense dairy products such as cheese, paneer, and sweets made from milk.

Adopt a natural fiber-rich diet- That includes:

- Vegetables and Fruits.
- Whole grains – Eat chapatis made from home ground whole wheat flour, Millets, Sorghum, Raghi, Kuttu (buckwheat), Rajgira (amaranth), etc. The home grain grinding machines are available at the cost of INR 15-20,000. The whole grain flour is rich in fiber. The grain that is richest in fiber is Millets. So make Millets an essential part of your diet. (Note: To know more about millets, review the section –"Millets the Miracle grain of past and future." On the website www.foodlifestylebalance.com).

- ***Cut down the consumption of grains in the diet and keep grains to vegetables as a 1:4 ratio.*** That is for the weight of every chapatti eat four times the weight in vegetables. Do not eat grain more than twice a day. The vegetables and fruits get digested in 4-6 hours, and in contrast, grains, which are dry food, take 16-24 hours to digest. Keep in mind that the longer the food stays in the intestine drier it gets.
- ***Natural cold compressed oils such as Sesame, Mustard, Coconut oil, and 1-3 teaspoons of Ghee*** The natural oils work as superior lubricating agents in the digestive tract. Additionally, cold compressed natural oils such as coconut and sesame work as gentle laxatives.
- ***Seeds and nuts-*** Good source of natural fiber and omega-three oils

4. *Enhance water intake-* Follow the rules of healthy water drinking:

- **Drink plain water or lemon water-** Avoid all sugary drinks.
- **Drink lukewarm room temperature water or clay pitcher (Matka) water;** avoid cold and iced water, which causes intestinal muscle spasm and is constipating.
- **Drink two water glasses in the morning, a glass half before meals, and a glass half-hour following meals.**
- **Drink when thirsty, when sweating, and keep water available and handy not to postpone water drinking.**
- **Ensure that you pass urine at least 4-5 times a day and that the urine is light yellow and not dark.**

5. *Exercise and activity-* Constipation is a companion of those not physically active and who live a sedentary lifestyle. When the body moves, the intestine also moves. Exercising in the morning will save you from getting constipated.

6. *Toilet Hygiene—*Sit on the toilet every day at the same time in the morning, even when there is no urge to defecate. You will be surprised that if you drink 1-2 glasses of warm water, walk briskly for 15-20 minutes, you will have a

natural desire. If you continue the habit, your bowel movement will naturally become regular.

7. *Fiber supplement before bedtime*—Many preparations can boost fiber intake:

- ***Psyllium husk (Isabgol)***-- It is the best and most widely used natural fiber supplement. It is available in different brands- "Organic India" Psyllium, "Now foods" whole Psyllium husk, and "Jiva brand" whole Psyllium husk. The key to taking Psyllium husk is to drink a lot of water (at least two glasses) with it or end up drying up the stool.
- ***Beet Root and Papaya***— Both beetroot and papaya work as very reliable mild natural laxatives. Make these a part of your daily diet.
- ***Figs or Anjeer and Prunes***—Fresh or dried--Make sure to soak dried figs and Prunes (dried AlooBKhara) 4-5 pieces in water until these are soft before eating.
- ***Mulethi or licorice root***-Eat a teaspoon of powdered root with an equal amount of jaggery
- ***Flax seeds (Also) and Sesame seeds***—Take equal amounts of Sesame and flaxseeds, grind these, and store them in the refrigerator. Eat 1-2 teaspoons daily with soups, in chapatti, over salads, etc. You will get the benefit of flavor as well as fiber. Plus, the healthy natural oil in these seeds works as a lubricant.

8. *Probiotics foods*—These foods improve digestion by supporting healthy digestive bacteria. The best probiotic food is homemade curd (dahi) and thin buttermilk (Chaach). Also, mustard seed works as an excellent prebiotic food to support digestive bacteria. Use pounded mustard seeds in pickles, raita, and fermented drinks (chaach, carrot, and beetroot kanji)

6. CONCLUSION

Constipation is a common problem in the modern urban population because food is too dry, highly refined, and deficient in fiber and natural oils. Treating Constipation with laxatives and medications weakens the intestinal muscles in the long run, making the problem worse, and leads to fecal impaction and other undesirable complications.

The ideal approach to eliminate Constipation is the natural cure as outlined below:

- 1. The first step is to eliminate hard and dry fecal matter**
- 2. Adopt a fiber-rich diet, maximize vegetables and fruits intake**
- 3. Eliminate refined factory-made cooking oils. Eat only cold compressed natural cooking oils such as Mustard, Sesame, Coconut oil, and 2-3 teaspoons of cow ghee daily (less if you are overweight).**
- 4. Eliminate refined wheat grain flour (milled wheat flour in packages and maida) products. Millets –all 6-7 varieties are rich in fiber and alkaline grain conducive to good health.**
- 5. Keep an active lifestyle (brisk walk, mobility, Pranayam and vajarasana)**
- 6. Drink an adequate amount of water**
- 7. Keep the diet rich in Prebiotics and Probiotics for healthy intestinal bacteria.**

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