










CONSTIPATION

December is Constipation Awareness month. We all have our own pattern of bowel movements. Constipation is when you have a bowel movement less than three times a week accompanied by straining and hard stool.

Constipation can affect approximately 1 in 3 women. Symptoms can include gas, bloating, pain or abdominal discomfort, straining, blood in the stool, hard stool, and a sensation of incomplete emptying of the rectum. The Bristol Stool Scale (below) is a way to assess the quality of bowel movements.

Goal Stool Types	Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts, hard to pass
	Type 2		Sausage-shaped, but lumpy
	Type 3		Like a sausage, but with cracks on its surface
	Type 4		Like a sausage or a snake, smooth and soft
	Type 5		Soft blobs with clear-cut edges, passed easily
	Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
	Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces. Entirely liquid

Causes of constipation can vary, from your diet, changes to your nerves or muscles in the pelvic floor, or medications you may be taking. Certain health problems can also affect your bowel movements.

Diet is a common reason for constipation and is usually due to not enough fiber or fluid intake. Foods low in fiber include white rice, white pasta and breads. Foods high in fiber include fruits such as dates and raspberries, vegetables like broccoli and

green peas, as well as legumes such as lentils and black beans. Women should have about 25 grams of fiber or more a day. Water intake is also important to prevent constipation.

Look at the medications you are taking and assess whether or not constipation is a significant side effect. Medications such as those for bladder urgency, depression, and pain can cause constipation. Discuss these side effects with your physician and ask if there's another alternative.

Other medical conditions that can affect bowel habits include irritable bowel syndrome, thyroid disorders, neurological disorders (such as multiple sclerosis) as well as cancers. These may be accompanied by other symptoms. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have concerns.

Diagnosis can often be made after a thorough history and physical examination by your physician. Keeping a diary of bowel habits and quality can be helpful.

What can you do to promote regularity?

- Eat at least 25 grams of fiber per day.
- Drink between 1.5 – 2.0 Liters of water or other liquids every day.
- Get moving. Up to 30 minutes per day of exercise can help.
- Check your medications to see if constipation is listed as a side effect.
- Talk to your doctor!

Learn more about constipation at IUGA's patient website, www.YourPelvicFloor.org.

This information is intended to be used for educational purposes only. It is not intended to be used for the diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition, which should only be done by a qualified physician or other health care professional.