

Functional constipation

(1) What is Constipation?

Constipation is passage of small amounts of hard, dry bowel movements, usually fewer than three times a week. People who are constipated may find it difficult and painful to have a bowel movement. Other symptoms of constipation include feeling bloated, uncomfortable, and sluggish.

Sometimes constipation can lead to complications. These include

- hemorrhoids caused by straining to have a bowel movement or
- anal fissures (tears in the skin around the anus) caused when hard stool stretches the sphincter muscle
- rectal bleeding
- rectal prolapse (a small amount of intestinal lining being pushed out from the anal opening)
- fecal impaction (hard stool packed in the intestine and rectum so tightly that the normal pushing action of the colon is not enough to expel the stool)

(2) What Causes Constipation?

- Functional causes: dietary factors (low residue), motility disturbance (slow transit time, outlet delay, irritable bowel syndrome), sedentary lifestyle
- Structural abnormalities: anorectal disorders (anal or perianal fissures, thrombosed hemorrhoids), colonic strictures (diverticulosis, ischemia, radiation therapy), colonic mass lesions with obstruction (adenocarcinoma), idiopathic megarectum
- Endocrine and metabolic conditions: diabetes mellitus, hypercalcemia, hyperparathyroidism, hypokalemia, hypothyroidism, pregnancy, uremia
- Neurogenic conditions: cerebrovascular events, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, Hirschsprung's disease, spinal cord tumors
- Smooth muscle and connective tissue disorders: amyloidosis, scleroderma
- Psychogenic conditions: anxiety, depression, somatization
- Drugs

(3) Diagnostic Criteria for Constipation in Adults

- Two or more of the following for at least 12 weeks in the preceding 12 months:
- Straining in more than 25% of defecations
- Lumpy or hard stools in more than 25% of defecations
- Sensation of incomplete evacuation in more than 25% of defecations
- Sensation of anorectal obstruction or blockade in more than 25% of defecations
- Manual maneuvers (e.g., digital evacuation) to facilitate more than 25% of defecations
- Fewer than three defecations per week
- Loose stools are not present, and there are insufficient criteria for the diagnosis of irritable bowel syndrome.

(4) How is Constipation Treated?

- Diet
- Lifestyle Changes
- Laxatives
 - ◆ Bulk-forming laxatives
 - ◆ Stimulants

- ◆ Stool softeners
- ◆ Lubricants
- ◆ Saline laxatives
- Biofeedback
- New drug trial from the University of Hong Kong, Queen Mary Hospital