

Constipation

Overview: Constipation is defined as:

- Difficulty passing stool
- Incomplete passing of stool
- Infrequent passing of stool

Causes of constipation may include:

Immobility	Musculoskeletal impairment
Inactivity	Obstructive lesions
Less than adequate intake of bulk fibers	Weak abdominal musculature
Medication side effects	Pain on defecation
Chronic use of medications	Diagnostic procedures
Chronic use of enemas	Lack of privacy for personal habits
Gastrointestinal lesions	Pregnancy
Neuromuscular impairment	Emotional stature

Constipation in pain management is common as many patients receive opioids to manage their chronic pain. Opioids decrease the motility of the gastrointestinal tract, thereby delaying the passage of the stool. Tolerance does not develop to constipation as it does to the other side effects of opiates.

Diagnosis: Patients with constipation complain of:

Abdominal pain	Appetite impairment
Inability to defecate	Abdominal pressure
Pain with defecation	Nausea
Hard formed stool	Back pain
Feelings of fullness	Headache

Along with attaining the patient's history, the health care provider can further determine constipation by noting the lack of bowel sounds, palpating the rectal mass, and palpating the abdomen for a mass. If the problem has been noted and addressed for a couple of days without resolve, the physician may order an abdominal x-ray to view the blockage and the cause of the blockage if visible.

Treatment: Constipation can be treated with a liberal diet of fruits, vegetables, and plenty of water. These tend to increase the hydration in the stool allowing it to move more readily through the system. Exercise helps the colon to initiate movement to move the stool through the system. Stool softening medications may be recommended and/or prescribed by the physician.