



HEALTH AWARENESS

Ask The Doctor: Common GI Complaints

(NAPSA)—Although some people may be uncomfortable talking about it, constipation is a common gastrointestinal (GI) complaint affecting more than 65 million Americans. In fact, about twice as many people are affected by constipation versus those that suffer from seasonal allergies. Understanding the causes, prevention and treatment of constipation can help people find relief.



Jack DiPalma

Jack DiPalma, M.D., immediate past president of the American College of Gastroenterology and director of gastroenterology at the University of South Alabama, answers questions about constipation and its management.

What is constipation and what causes it?

The range of “normal” bowel habits is very wide. Not everybody has a bowel movement every day. “Normal” frequency generally ranges from three bowel movements per day to three per week. Normal stools are soft and formed, not hard or lumpy, and passed without urgency or straining. A change from your normal pattern would suggest you may have constipation.

Constipation can stem from lifestyle causes such as diet and inadequate fluid intake; physical inactivity; stress or anxiety; and medical conditions such as pregnancy, diabetes or hypothyroidism. Constipation can also be caused or exacerbated by narcotic analgesics, antacids, anti-cholinergics or iron supplements.

It is important to treat constipation—an uncomfortable condition that can impair quality of life and lead to reduced productivity.

How is constipation treated?

The treatment of constipation includes dietary and lifestyle changes and laxatives. Dietary and lifestyle changes include adding more fiber to the diet, increasing physical activity and drinking more water. Laxative treatment may be used; however, not all laxatives are the same. Some laxatives may cause uncomfortable cramps.

But the good news is that MiraLAX®, a commonly prescribed laxative, is now available over the counter to treat occasional constipation. This laxative works with the body to increase the frequency of bowel movements without causing the side effects of gas and cramps. MiraLAX has a strong safety profile.