

Your Pathway for Managing Chronic Constipation (adults)

What is chronic constipation?

- Chronic constipation means constipation that lasts for a long time (months or years) or keeps coming back over a long period of time.
- It can have many causes.
- Many people will have symptoms of chronic constipation at some point in their lives.
- Usually cared for by healthcare providers in your family doctor's office.

What is the chronic constipation patient pathway?

It is a map for you and your healthcare providers to follow. It makes sure the care you are getting for chronic constipation is safe and helpful in managing your symptoms.

You and your healthcare providers may modify the pathway to best suit your healthcare needs.

If symptoms cannot be managed over time, you and your healthcare providers may decide a referral to a specialist would be helpful.

1. Check your symptoms

Do you have 2 or more of the following symptoms for at least 3 of the last 6 months?

- Less than 3 stools per week
- Hard or lumpy stool
- Straining during bowel movements
- Feel like you are unable to get all your stool out
- Feel like something is blocking your stool from coming out

2. Make lifestyle changes to manage your symptoms (see over for details)

- Make time in your day for bowel movements; don't ignore the urge
- Make sure to get plenty of water daily
- Increase your fibre intake
- Try to get at least 20 minutes of physical activity daily. Aim for 150 minutes each week

3. Tests that may be done

- Blood tests
- Other tests are rarely needed

Tell your healthcare providers if you have these symptoms:

- Family history of colon cancer
- Sudden change in bowel habits
- Stool that is black in colour or has blood in it
- Losing weight without meaning to

Talk to your healthcare providers if your symptoms don't improve, get worse, or keep interfering with your everyday activities

Once you find something that works for you, stick with it.

You may need to keep trying other options to find what works best to manage your symptoms.



4. Medicine that may be tried

- Many options can be used to promote bowel movements and improve your symptoms
- Talk with your healthcare providers about what medicines may be right for you



What do I need to know about my symptoms and chronic constipation?

Working through the chronic constipation patient pathway can take several months:

- Your healthcare provider(s) will ask you questions about your health and do a physical exam. They will also review any medicines you are taking.
- They may suggest certain tests to learn more about possible causes of your symptoms.
- They will talk with you about possible lifestyle habits that may be causing your symptoms and how you can make changes that could help you feel better.
- You may find it helpful to write down your symptoms and bowel routine. You and your healthcare provider(s) can make a plan to help manage your symptoms using this information.
- Together, you may decide to try certain dietary changes and/or medicines to help in treating your symptoms.
- You may use medicines for a short amount of time (or possibly longer) depending on whether your symptoms improve.

To manage your symptoms, try to:

- Get at least 20 minutes of physical activity daily. Aim for 150 minutes each week (e.g. walking, biking, gardening, stairs, or your favourite sports).
- Choose high fibre foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and legumes (e.g. beans, peas, and lentils).
- Consider using a fibre supplement (e.g. psyllium, inulin).
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day.

Seeing a specialist is only recommended if:

- Your symptoms continue or get worse after following treatment and management options in the chronic constipation pathway.
- You and your healthcare providers identify concerning symptoms or test results.

You can find more information in the great resources below:

- Canadian Digestive Health Foundation cdhf.ca
* search Constipation
- MyHealth.Alberta.ca myhealth.alberta.ca
* search Constipation
- Nutrition Education Materials ahs.ca/NutritionResources

Write any notes or questions you may have here:

Please provide feedback about this patient pathway by completing a short [survey](https://bit.ly/DHSCNsSurvey) (bit.ly/DHSCNsSurvey) or email us at Digestivehealth.SCN@ahs.ca



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