

Script – Broadcast – Bathroom blues

INTRO

We've all been there. That uncomfortable feeling in your gut. The annoying stomach pain. The bloating and the difficulty of having a complete bowel movement. No matter what you do or what you try, you just can't go. You might be constipated.

Many times, it's a temporary setback. Maybe it was that late night pizza or one too many hot dogs that has you backed up. But for others, it can be a chronic problem due to diet, medication, lack of exercise or dehydration. Sometimes, constipation can be a sign of something more serious.

Constipation usually means three or fewer bowel movements a week, says Breanne Gendron, a nurse practitioner with OSF HealthCare.

((SOS))

Breanne Gendron, nurse practitioner, OSF HealthCare

"Constipation is usually defined by discomfort in their abdomen because they haven't been going to the bathroom and having bowel movements as often as they should. Some people have bowel movements every day. Some people have bowel movements every third day, and that's their normal." (:14)

VO

There are plenty of reasons why people get plugged up from time to time. Certain medications can play a role in constipation. Pain medications, calcium supplements and some antidepressants have an influence.

Opioids bind to receptors in the intestines, which slows down the movement of food and waste (stool) through the colon. Additionally, opioids also increase water absorption in the intestines, making the stool harder and more difficult to pass.

There are other factors that can impact bowel movements such as travel, stress, a lack of activity or anything that interferes with your normal routine. There are also non-diet and exercise-related causes of constipation. Structural changes such as a tumor or hemorrhoids can cause constipation and so can stress and anxiety.

Constipation can frustrate anyone, from young children to older people. Children between the ages of 5 to 12 will complain to their parents of stomach pain due to a lack of regularity. As for older adults, the digestive track tends to slow down as we age.

TAG

Becoming regular again usually boils down to dietary and lifestyle changes. Gendron says the fiber goal should be 25 to 30 grams each day. Some of the best foods that help with fiber intake include beans, leafy vegetables, oatmeal, nuts, berries and apples.

Take time for at least 30 minutes of exercise a day. Walking is great way to kickstart your bowels. And establish a routine. Get in the habit of going to the bathroom at the same time each day. And never put off the urge to go.

So, if your constipation does not go away through diet, hydration and exercise, or your symptoms become worse, such as blood in your stool, fever or vomiting, it's time for medical intervention.