



IS CONSTIPATION EVER SERIOUS?

At the very most non-threatening

Straining during a bowel movement, or passing a hard stool can lead to or worsen haemorrhoids, which are swollen veins in the rectal area. Haemorrhoids can be extremely uncomfortable, though they rarely cause serious problems. In most cases, they go away fairly soon after your baby is born.

Occasionally constipation can be a symptom of another problem. If you have severe constipation accompanied by abdominal pain; constipation alternating with diarrhoea; or if you pass mucus or blood, you should contact your doctor.



WHAT CAN I DO IF IT DOESN'T HELP?

Talk to your doctor

If the measures listed above don't help, talk to your physician about what mild laxatives are safe to use during pregnancy. There is very little published information available on the potential risks of commonly used laxatives during pregnancy.

However, if lifestyle changes are not effective, bulk-forming agents such as wheat bran, osmotic laxatives, and stool softeners may be considered. Check with your healthcare provider before taking any medication to treat pregnancy constipation.

Talk to your physician before taking any medication.

CONSTIPATION

A very frequent complaint ...

during pregnancy





CONSTIPATION IN PREGNANCY

*Almost every second woman affected**
Constipation in pregnancy can be very uncomfortable. It is very common - about half of all pregnant women experience it.

In general, constipation is often caused by not enough exercise, not enough fibre in the diet, stress and anxiety. In pregnancy, some changes happen in your body that can make it more likely.

* Abreu GE et al. Arq Gastroenterol 2018;55(Suppl 1):35.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY BOWEL DURING PREGNANCY?

A time of changes
Hormonal changes in pregnancy affect the whole digestive system. Especially the female hormone, progesterone, makes muscles relax. It can make the muscles of the bowel less active, slowing down your digestion. Later in pregnancy, the expanding uterus and the growing baby squeeze the intestines and make it harder for them to work.

Other contributing factors can be medications (e.g. against heart-burn) or dietary supplements (especially calcium and iron).



SIGNS OF CONSTIPATION

A symptom not a disease
Constipation is when you find it difficult to pass stool or when the time between your bowel movements is much longer than usual. However, the normal time between bowel movements is very individual and varies greatly from person to person - from two or three times a week to two or three times a day. Which of the following statements are true for you?

- True?
- I strain during more than one in four bowel movements.
 - I have hard stools in more than one in four bowel movements.
 - I have a feeling of not being finished after more than one in four bowel movements.
 - I have no more than two bowel movements in a week.

Did you mark more than two of these statements as true?
Have you had these symptoms for more than three months?
If the answers are "yes", then you have a clear case of constipation.



WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

Challenge your habits
There are a number of things you can do both to prevent constipation from occurring and to help it go away. Here are some tips:

- **Eat enough fibre:** Fibre is important because it pushes the intestines to work harder. It also absorbs liquid and will help ensure that the faeces remain soft. Choose high-fibre foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole-grain cereals and bread, brown rice, beans, peas and prunes. If you are not used to eating a lot of fibre, add fibre to your diet gradually.
- **Drink enough liquid:** Drinking plenty of liquid is important, particularly if you increase your fibre intake. If there is not enough liquid in the diet, the process of digestion will slow down, the intestine can't do its job and the faeces will become hard and difficult to pass. Sweat, hot/humid climates, and exercise may increase your need for liquid.
- **Do some moderate exercise:** During pregnancy, walking, swimming or other moderate exercise gently stimulates the bowel and helps the intestines work. And an exercise program can do even more than keep your bowel movements regular. Exercise can help you prepare for childbirth and make labour easier.
- **Listen to your body:** Never put off going to the bathroom when you feel the urge. Holding in a bowel movement can weaken the bowel muscles, which may make it harder to push stool out of your body.