

Stop the Pressing! 13 Causes of Constipation

By Scott LaFee | May 07, 2015

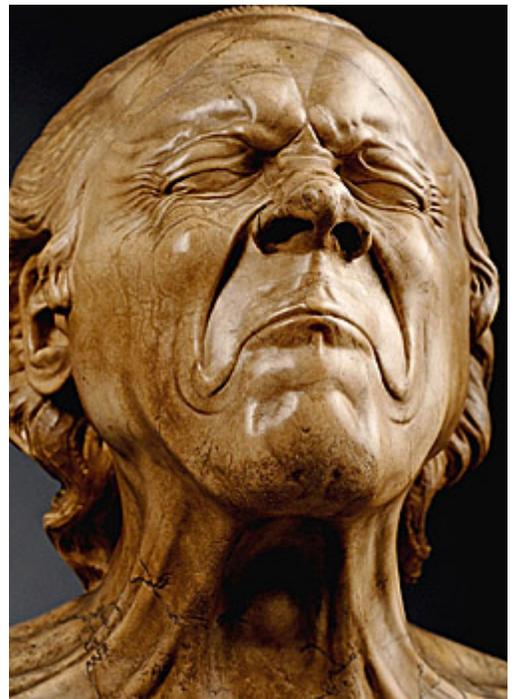
Most people don't think of constipation as a serious disease, but it can be. It's also a serious health issue, with the number of emergency room visits for constipation reported to be rising.

A [study](#) in the *American Journal of Gastroenterology* reports that there were 497,034 ER visits for constipation in 2006; 703,391 visits in 2011, an increase of 42 percent. Infants and seniors are the most likely visitors. The estimated cost of those visits was \$1.6 billion.

The medical definition of constipation is an acute or chronic condition in which bowel movements occur less often than usual or consist of hard, dry stools that are painful or difficult to pass. While bowel habits vary by individual, an adult who has not had a movement in three days or a child in four days is considered to be constipated. It's estimated that constipation affects 12 to 19 percent of the U.S. population.

Constipation is typically caused by a lack of dietary fiber (recommended daily fiber intake is 25-30 grams). Here are 13 more surprising causes:

- [Hypothyroidism](#), which means an underactive thyroid gland slowing the body's metabolic processes.
- Painkilling medications, especially narcotics. There is some evidence that chronic use of pain relievers like aspirin and ibuprofen may also cause a problem.
- Chocolate (also bananas and black tea), particularly in persons with a chronic condition or [irritable bowel disease](#). Read more about [IBD here](#).
- Some nutritional supplements, such as calcium and iron, can cause a problem in some people.



- Overuse of laxatives. Some laxatives work by stimulating bowel activity, but overuse can result in dependence, meaning the body stops functioning normally without them. Use only as directed by label or your doctor.
- Too much dairy (high fat/low fiber) can slow the digestive system.
- Antidepressants, such as [selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors](#) , have been associated with higher risk of constipation.
- Depression.
- Antacids, particularly those containing calcium or aluminum, can lead to constipation.
- Blood pressure and allergy medications. Constipation can be a side effect.
- Inflammatory bowel disease, including Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.
- Childbirth can cause constipation, possibly due to sluggish abdominal muscles or drugs used during delivery. Constipation can also be a problem during pregnancy.
- Diabetes and neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis that may damage nerves affecting the digestive process.

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