

# Healthy Bowel Habits

## What Is Constipation?

Constipation is defined as passing a bowel movement ***less than 3 times per week.***

Maintaining and prioritizing healthy bowel habits both inside and outside of the bathroom is going to be integral in regulating your bowel movements. Below are examples of habits you can introduce into your daily life to help.

## Outside of the Bathroom:

- Keeping your diet full of fiber and health fruits and vegetables
- Drinking plenty of water - It is recommended to drink 0.5 ounces of water for every pound you weigh
- Creating a bathroom routine - making sure you have time to go 10-30 minutes after you eat, making sure there are places you can use the bathroom if you are out and about, or even trying to go to the bathroom every 2-3 hours
- Getting 20-30 minutes of exercise in daily - exercising increases the movement in your bowels

## Inside of the Bathroom:

- Knee Positioning on the Toilet - getting your knees slightly above your hips is the optimal position for passing a bowel movement. You can use items like a squatty potty, a kids stool, or even rolls of toilet paper to set your feet on to get you into that optimal position.

## Inside of the Bathroom

- Upper Body Positioning - It is also helpful to lean forward and rest your arms on your thighs or, if you can, reach down and hold onto your ankles. During a difficult bowel movement, it may be helpful to switch between your thighs and ankles every minute or so.
- No straining! - Pushing too hard to poop can actually make it *harder* to pass a bowel movement. Try deep breathing to relax your pelvic floor muscles instead of straining and pushing.
- Keep your lips, jaw, and mouth open - maintaining relaxation in your facial muscles will translate to relaxation in your pelvic muscles during a bowel movement
- Breathing - take slow deep breaths in through your nose and breathe slowly out through your mouth

## Other Considerations

- Beware of Medications - many doctors will prescribe stool softeners such as miralax to alleviate constipation. Use of stool softeners can be very helpful for people when used appropriately. However, heavy doses of these stool softeners will only stress the system by producing a "quick flush". This quick flush may lead to urgency and an overall stress response. In short, stool softeners will not fix the underlying issues of constipation.
- Balance is Best! - Our main goal with bowel movements is to get a **daily poop!** The reason for this is that the longer stool is in the colon, the bigger and harder it becomes and therefore is harder to pass. When we are able to pass a bowel movement daily, we limit how much poop we are trying to pass. Our goal is to rely less on stool softeners and help your body get in a good schedule of passing a bowel movement every day.