



Constipation, Bowel Obstructions

Constipation can be a severe quality of life issue.

Constipation is a state in which a person experiences a decrease in frequency or passage of hard, dry stools; difficult defecation; and sluggish action of the bowels.

Complications from constipation can cause serious illness, including death. Complete blockage of bowel function, known as bowel

obstruction, can be fatal unless recognized and treated in time; it requires hospitalization with medical or surgical intervention.

Bowel obstructions were in the top 10 reasons for unscheduled hospitalizations between 2014 and 2016 for Ohioans with developmental disabilities.

Family members and support staff should alert medical caregivers to



signs of illness, as some people with developmental disabilities might not recognize or be able to communicate their symptoms.

In 2016, there were 148 unscheduled hospitalizations reported resulting from bowel obstructions, making up 3% of all unscheduled hospitalizations for Ohioans with DD

Causes of constipation

- Poor or irregular bowel habits
- Not drinking enough fluid or eating enough fiber or nutritious foods
- Physical inactivity, including paralysis
- Surgery on intestine or rectum
- Many prescription and non-prescription medications and combinations
- Previous stroke, cancer, or hemorrhoids

Symptoms of Bowel Obstructions

- Vomiting, especially when repeated or having fecal odor
- Cramps or abdominal pain
- Fever and chills
- Reluctance to eat or dehydration
- Abdominal bloating or distention
- Passing blood and mucus but no fecal matter

Best Practices to Decrease Constipation

- Encourage eating more fiber, which helps form soft, bulky stools and is found in many vegetables, fruits, and whole grains
- Promote regular exercise to support active and healthy digestive system
- Review medications that could cause or contribute to constipation
- Encourage drinking six to eight glasses of water per day
- Allow enough time for and encourage routine toileting
- Mild symptoms of constipation or obstruction can resemble the flu; be aware of associated bowel changes and report to health care provider
- Consult a physician before taking laxatives
- Seek prompt medical attention for anyone experiencing symptoms of bowel obstructions

Talking about constipation can be embarrassing; it's important to provide guidance and support to allow people to have an active role in monitoring their diet and bowel movement schedules