



Constipation is a challenge facing many people. Having constipation while living with Parkinson disease (PD) can have a negative impact on your enjoyment of life. Arming yourself with information to prevent or manage constipation is an important part of living well and promoting a healthy lifestyle.

What is constipation?

It is a myth that you must have a bowel movement/pass stool/"poop" at least once a day. Many things influence the frequency of bowel movements: age, diet, medications, stress, inactivity, and having PD or other medical conditions. A normal range is 3 times a day to 3 times a week. The stool you pass should be soft, easy to pass and, at the end of it, you should feel that your bowel is "empty". Infrequent bowel movements (fewer than every 3-4 days), a stool that is hard and dry, or straining to expel it, may mean constipation. It is time to act!

Being constipated can be more than just a nuisance. It may interfere with how well your medications are absorbed, making them less effective. Being constipated can make you feel unwell, uncomfortable, irritable, nauseated or lethargic. In severe cases, it can lead to a blockage of the intestine (impaction), making it impossible to pass any stool. In very rare circumstances, impaction requires urgent medical attention. Constipation may also disturb your bladder function and may make you feel that you need to urinate more frequently and urgently.

Parkinson disease and constipation

Not everyone who has PD has constipation. However, many people with PD deal with constipation and it can be a real burden. PD affects the bowels in a number of ways:

- Just as the muscles in your arms, legs, trunk and face may be slower and stiff, the muscles of your intestines (bowels) may also have reduced mobility. With slowed mobility, the stool ("poop") does not move very quickly through the bowel. This may cause constipation. The muscles involved in emptying the bowels may also be affected by PD and may not be as coordinated as before. They may not be able to relax, making it more difficult to eliminate the stool completely.
- Certain drugs used to treat PD symptoms may cause constipation or affect your appetite. If you start a medication and you notice a change in how frequently you have a bowel movement, contact your healthcare team. They will review all your medications and make recommendations.

Not drinking enough fluids and difficulty chewing and/or swallowing can contribute to constipation as well. Trouble with chewing and swallowing can make it hard to get enough fibre in your diet.

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