



DOWN SYNDROME PROGRAM  
[www.massgeneral.org/downsyndrome](http://www.massgeneral.org/downsyndrome)

# Understanding Constipation in People with Down Syndrome

Constipation can make it very uncomfortable to use the bathroom. It can also negatively affect your behavior. This handout will help you understand what constipation is and its causes and symptoms of constipation. It will also explain how you can help ease the discomfort of constipation.

## WHAT IS CONSTIPATION?

Constipation is when stools are hard, dry or difficult to pass. This can make passing stool uncomfortable. It can also make you want to delay or avoid using the bathroom.

Sometimes, you can pass loose stool around the hard stool that is stuck. We say someone is constipated when he or she has 1 of these signs:

- Passing stool fewer than 3 times a week
- Stools that are hard, dry and small so it is difficult to pass
- An X-ray that shows you are constipated

## WHY AM I CONSTIPATED?

People who have Down syndrome have lower muscle tone. This can make it harder to pass stool. You can become constipated for many other reasons. Some of these reasons are:

- Diet that is low in fiber
- Lack of exercise
- Certain medications
- Ignoring the urge to pass stool
- Other medical conditions, like celiac disease or untreated thyroid disease

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF CONSTIPATION?

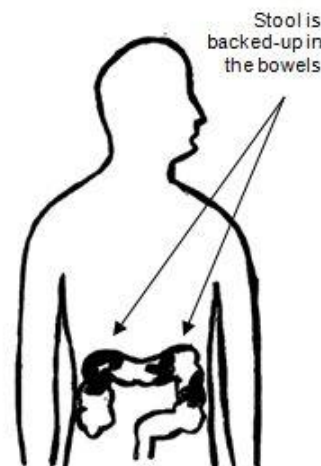
When you are constipated, the symptoms can be uncomfortable. You may have some of these symptoms:

- Feeling full or bloated
- Feeling pain when passing stool
- Having to push hard when passing stool
- Noticing a little blood on the toilet paper from straining to pass stool
- Having accidents with loose stool

## HOW CAN I HELP EASE CONSTIPATION?

There are a few ways you can help ease constipation, which are to:

- **Eat foods that are high in fiber.**
- **Get enough exercise.**
- **Do not ignore the urge to pass stool.**
- **Have your doctor go over your medications to see if any of them can cause constipation.**



*Constipation is when stools are hard, dry or difficult to pass. This picture shows stool that is backed up in the person's intestines.*

If you are very constipated, ask the doctor about an initial clean-out. This is when you take medication to ease constipation. Talk to the doctor *before* starting an initial clean-out.