

Constipation Myths¹

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What causes constipation?

Constipation is a common health concern for the older adult and may contribute to a lack of appetite, as well as more serious health problems. Constipation may result from a number of health conditions and diseases, and is a side effect of many drugs. Lack of exercise also contributes to constipation. Low fiber intake is the most common cause of constipation.

There are many myths about constipation. The following questions and answers address some of those myths.

Q: *Does drinking lots of water prevent constipation?*

A: Fluid intake alone will not prevent constipation. However, dehydration may contribute to constipation (Chung, Parekh, and Sellin 1999).

Q: *Does eating cheese cause constipation?*

A: A group of retirement home residents were given a 10-fold increase in cheese. No changes in signs of constipation were found (Mykknen et al. 1994).

Q: *Does aging cause constipation?*

A: Age alone does not cause constipation. Older adults are at increased risk of constipation due to lower fiber intake, medication use, immobility, and disease (DeGiorgio et al. 2015).

In practice, constipation is often defined by stool frequency of fewer than three times per week. Symptoms include straining, prolonged passage of stool, pain, and incomplete emptying (Leung et al. 2011)

References

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