

Constipation

What Is Constipation?

Constipation is a common digestive issue that affects people of all ages. It occurs when bowel movements become less frequent or harder to pass than usual, often causing discomfort, bloating, and a sense of incomplete emptying. While occasional constipation is normal, persistent or severe symptoms may require medical attention to identify and treat any underlying causes.

At Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic, we specialise in diagnosing and managing constipation, helping you find relief and improve your digestive health.

What Causes Constipation?

Constipation can be caused by a variety of factors, including lifestyle habits, dietary choices, and medical conditions. Common causes include:

- **Low-fibre diet** – A lack of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in your diet can make stools harder and more difficult to pass.
- **Dehydration** – Not drinking enough fluids can lead to dry, hard stools.
- **Lack of physical activity** – A sedentary lifestyle can slow bowel movements.
- **Ignoring the urge to go** – Delaying bowel movements can lead to stool buildup and harder stools.
- **Medications** – Certain drugs, such as painkillers (opioids), iron supplements, and some antidepressants, can cause constipation.
- **Pregnancy** – Hormonal changes and pressure on the bowel during pregnancy can lead to constipation.
- **Changes in routine** – Travel, stress, or changes in your daily habits can disrupt bowel movements.

In some cases, constipation may be linked to medical conditions such as:

- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- Hypothyroidism
- Diabetes
- Neurological conditions such as Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis
- Obstruction or narrowing of the bowel

What Are The Symptoms Of Constipation?

The symptoms of constipation may vary but commonly include:

- Fewer than three bowel movements per week
- Hard, dry, or lumpy stools
- Straining or difficulty passing stools
- Feeling of incomplete emptying after a bowel movement
- Abdominal pain or bloating
- Loss of appetite

If these symptoms persist for more than a few weeks or worsen over time, it's important to seek medical advice.

When To Seek Urgent Medical Attention

While constipation is usually harmless, certain symptoms may indicate a more serious issue. Contact your doctor immediately if you experience:

- Severe abdominal pain or swelling
- Vomiting alongside constipation
- Blood in your stool or black, tar-like stools
- Unexplained weight loss
- Sudden onset of constipation, especially if you're older or have a family history of bowel disease

How Is Constipation Diagnosed?

At Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic, we use advanced diagnostic tools to identify the cause of your constipation. Your consultant may recommend:

- **Medical history and physical examination** - Discussing your symptoms, diet, lifestyle, and any medications you're taking.
- **Blood tests** - To check for conditions like thyroid dysfunction or anaemia.
- **Stool tests** - To detect signs of infection or inflammation.
- **Colonoscopy** - A flexible camera is used to examine the colon for abnormalities such as polyps, strictures, or signs of bowel disease.
- **Imaging tests** - X-rays, CT scans, or MRI may be used to assess the structure of your digestive system.
- **Anorectal manometry** - To evaluate the muscles and nerves involved in bowel movements.

How Is Constipation Treated?

Treatment for constipation depends on the underlying cause and severity of your symptoms. Common treatment options include:

- **Dietary changes** - Increasing fibre intake through fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can help soften stools and improve regularity.
- **Hydration** - Drinking plenty of water can prevent stools from becoming hard and dry.
- **Exercise** - Regular physical activity can stimulate bowel movements.
- **Laxatives** - Over-the-counter or prescribed laxatives may be used short-term to relieve symptoms. These include bulk-forming laxatives, stool softeners, and stimulant laxatives.
- **Medication adjustments** - If constipation is caused by medication, your doctor may suggest alternatives.
- **Pelvic floor therapy** - For people with difficulty passing stools, therapy can help strengthen the muscles involved in bowel movements.

In rare cases, surgery may be necessary to address structural issues, such as a bowel obstruction or stricture.

Why Choose Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic?

At Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic, we provide expert care for constipation and other digestive conditions. Our experienced team uses state-of-the-art diagnostic tools and a patient-centred approach to identify the root cause of your symptoms and develop a tailored treatment plan. Whether your constipation is occasional or chronic, we are here to help you find relief and improve your quality of life.

Contact Us

If you're struggling with persistent constipation or have concerns about your digestive health, contact Birmingham Gastroenterology Clinic today to book a consultation. Early diagnosis and effective treatment can make a significant difference in managing your symptoms and restoring your comfort.