



Constipation: Symptoms, Causes & Relief



Jules McKie
Health

What is constipation?

Constipation is commonly defined as less than three bowel movements per week.

For me, I see an issue if you're not having at least one BM daily. If that's the case for you, then there's an underlying cause that needs to be addressed.

And there are a range of indicator's and symptoms to consider, including:

- Form: hard stools (Bristol Stool Chart Type 1 & 2 - see next page)
- Frequency: <1 bowel motion a day
- Bloating: abdominal bloating & gas
- Pain: abdominal pain or discomfort associated with defecation
- Sensation: incomplete evacuation or feelings of obstruction
- Straining: difficult to pass stools
- Laxatives: reliance on laxatives



Symptom -v- Root Cause

A symptom is the issue or result that you notice - e.g. constipation, bloating, etc.

A root cause is the reason the issue (constipation) is occurring - e.g. gut dysbiosis, liver burden, etc. If you only know the symptom, you can only focus on suppressing those symptoms in the short-term. Using laxatives for extended periods is a good example of only temporarily suppressing the constipation symptom.

But constipation is a symptom that has a root cause that can't be fixed simply by identifying that you have motility issues. You can only fix constipation once you identify WHY? you have constipation.



BRISTOL STOOL CHART

TYPE 1



SEPERATE HARD LUMPS, LIKE NUTS
(HARD TO PASS)

TYPE 2



SAUSAGE-SHAPED BUT LUMPY

TYPE 3



LIKE A SAUSAGE BUT WITH
CRACKS ON THE SURFACE

TYPE 4



LIKE A SAUSAGE OR SNAKE,
SMOOTH AND SOFT

TYPE 5



SOFT BLOBS WITH CLEAR-CUT
EDGES

TYPE 6



FLUFFY PIECES WITH RAGGED
EDGES, A MUSHY STOOL

TYPE 7



WATERY, NO SOLID PIECES

**Slow
Transit**



IDEAL



**Rapid
Transit**



Bristol Stool Chart Explained

Type 1 - Indicates constipation due to lack of fibre, low levels of beneficial gut bacteria or antibiotic use

Type 2 - Possible IBS symptom and long-term chronic constipation

Type 3 - May indicate latent constipation

Type 4 - OPTIMAL

Type 5 - May indicate incomplete digestion (especially if food particles are visible), or not enough fibre or carbs to feed beneficial gut flora

Type 6 - Indicates abnormally rapid transit time and can be the result of stress, medication, laxatives or gut issues

Type 7 - Typical diarrhoea - usually results from food poisoning or waterborne gut infections - but can also be the result of 'bypass' or 'overflow' diarrhoea resulting from severe constipation or faecal impaction.



Constipation Root Cause

To start with, there are a range of common causes or contributing factors, to constipation and likely more than one.

These can include:

- Excess methane production in the gut caused by an imbalance in the microbiome
- Dehydration
- Thyroid, endocrine and other hormonal issues
- Metabolic dysfunction
- Stress and neurological issues
- Low stomach acid
- Liver burden and bile insufficiency
- Medication (always read the insert)
- Dietary causes as a result of insufficient nutrients or poor diet.

I've expanded on some common root causes on the following pages.



Constipation Root Cause #1:

Gut Infection

When we talk about gut infections, we're referring to infections anywhere from the stomach right through to the small intestine and the colon.

They are caused by pathogens, the most common being:

- Parasites: Blastocystis hominis, Entamoeba histolytica, Giardia lamblia, Cryptosporidium parvum, Dientamoeba fragilis
- Bacteria: Helicobacter pylori, Citrobacter, Campylobacter, Clostridium difficile, Klebsiella pneumoniae
- Fungi/Yeast: Candida albicans
- Traveller's bug
- Food poisoning
- Prior use of antibiotics; and more



Constipation Root Cause #1: Gut Infection

While gastro-intestinal bugs are typically associated with diarrhoea, constipation is a common symptom that is less noticeable but tends to last much longer and cause more chronic, long term side-effects.

Pathogenic bacteria can also give off endotoxins. Endotoxins are the lipopolysaccharide-protein complexes, produced at the time of cell death. These endotoxins can 'paralyse' the muscles around the intestines, slowing peristalsis (motility) so that the organisms are protected and don't get removed with the stool as easily as they may have before. Constipation can then create an environment in which pathogens can further grow and proliferate.



Constipation Root Cause #2: SIBO

SIBO is characterised by an increased number and/or abnormal type of bacteria in the small intestine. These bacteria generally live in the large intestine and are mostly species that ferment carbohydrates into hydrogen gas (H_2) or archaea (not technically bacteria) that produce methane gas (CH_4).

While both hydrogen and methane SIBO typically result in abdominal bloating and distention, as seen with IBS, SIBO types are divided into one of three different categories:

- Diarrhoea-dominant
- Constipation-dominant; or
- Alternating variations of both...



Constipation Root Cause #2: SIBO

Studies suggest as many as 85% of people diagnosed with IBS have SIBO.

- Diarrhoea-dominant SIBO is generally the result of carbohydrate-fermenting bacteria that produce hydrogen gas.
- Constipation sufferers, on the other hand, generally have archaea to blame.

During the fermentation of carbohydrates, archaea, such as *M.smithii*, feed off hydrogen produced by bacteria and produce a by-product called methane. As with hydrogen, methane gas in the small intestine will cause abdominal bloating, plus a much bigger problem – slowed transit time and ultimately, constipation.



Constipation Root Cause #3: Food Sensitivities & Inflammation

Client's with food sensitivities commonly present with many other irritable bowel symptoms, including constipation.

The most prevalent food triggers for irritable bowel sufferers include reactions to:

- Gluten
- Pasteurised dairy and eggs
- Nuts
- FODMAP's, salicylates and more.

These include true allergies (IgE-mediated immune response) or more mild intolerances (IgG-mediated immune response) as well as enzyme deficiencies that can lead to conditions like lactose or fructose malabsorption.



Constipation Root Cause #3: Food Sensitivities & Inflammation

Food allergies, intolerances and malabsorption are very common IBS-C symptoms.

It's also worth noting that food allergies and intolerances are also the result of a deeper root cause and some of the conditions previously mentioned, like gut infection and intestinal permeability.

So while food triggers can definitely make symptoms worse, generally they're not the end of the line, but rather a sign of a deeper root cause.

Avoiding trigger foods, however, is not a long term solution, but can help during the healing process, while addressing the real issue or issues.



What's The Link Between Hypothyroidism & Constipation?

While hypothyroidism (low thyroid function) is also generally a symptom of a root cause, and is often associated with digestive and hormone related issues, there is also a very common link that exists between low functioning thyroid conditions and constipation.

Having hypothyroidism means your thyroid gland isn't producing enough TSH (Thyroid Stimulating Hormone) or your liver conversion pathways are insufficient.

Because thyroid hormones play a huge role in helping manage your bodily processes, systems throughout your body slow down when these levels are low. Digestion and elimination of waste are among two of the many processes that can be affected.



The Stress Factor

Gut - Brain - Constipation Link

You've heard it before! The gut-brain connection. Your brain and gut are in constant communication with each other via the vagus nerve, which is like a super highway connecting your gut and brain. The vagus nerve is in fact the longest cranial nerve that connects your brain to the rest of your body. It passes through the neck and thorax to the abdomen, including your heart, lungs, gut, liver and pancreas.

Hence, what affects your brain also affects your gut and vice versa!

Stress, and other emotions like anxiety, depression or grief can disturb brain-gut communication, trigger inflammation and cause chronic gastrointestinal issues, including:



The Stress Factor

Gut - Brain - Constipation Link

Hyperpermeability, bloating and yes, even constipation. This enteric nervous system is made up of millions of neurons that help control various activities in your gut, including movement of food, blood flow, stomach secretions and motility. But chronic stress - sympathetic state - can disrupt communication and cause stress hormones to be released.

Chronic stress can eventually lead to gut issues, including: delayed migrating motor complex function which slows down the speed of movement of food, causing motility issues and constipation. Stress can also weaken the gut's barrier that prevents food related bacteria entering the body. And can cause the body to use more magnesium which is essential for optimal bowel function.



Determining the root cause of constipation & find relief?

Functional interpretation of your blood marker's - assessed against optimal ranges - alongside a thorough symptoms analysis, are common tools I use to uncover the root cause of digestive and constipation issues and determine the best course of treatment to assist healing and optimise health.

Additional testing is rarely needed, but can be carried out if needed:

1. Stool testing for gut infections
2. Breath testing for SIBO
3. Allergy testing for sensitivities

Once we have the answers, a tailored protocol is the next step, and your path to healing and a properly functioning colon can begin.



Work with me

The key takeaway is that constipation is not an isolated condition. Nor is it a root cause! It is a symptom of a condition.

There is always a root cause for any health issue and there is a root cause that can explain why you don't experience regular, complete or well-formed bowel movements.

As a functional nutritionist, gut therapist and embodied health transformation coach I have helped hundreds of people like you identify the root cause of their digestive and hormonal issues and optimise their health.

To learn more about working with me or to book a consultation, head to my website:

www.julesmckiehealth.com





Constipation Relief Protocol



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Constipation Relief Protocol

An important thing to highlight before you move into this protocol is that it is not designed to heal any deeper digestive issues that are causing constipation. It is simply designed to provide relief and assist digestion and motility. It is not designed to address the deeper root cause.

Secondly, it is unlikely constipation is the result of an isolated biological or physiological condition. In the majority of people I have worked with, constipation has mental and emotional ties to fear, control, stress and trauma, that can manifest as holding on and an inability to let go.

This means that healing is not just one dimensional, and why I recommend complementary modalities in my tailored protocols to help support and build on the mind-body-soul connection.



Constipation Relief Protocol

Modalities like movement, relaxation, breathing and visualisation techniques are a compliment to any healing protocol. I go deeper into this in my 1:1 coaching, but highly recommend investigating the links to some of my favourite FREE content below:

- **Walk (Brisk)** - at least 1-hour a day and at least 15 minutes after larger meals.
- **Yoga or movement** - stretching and movement are essential for mind-body connection and health.
- **Breathwork** - helps tone the vagus nerve and stimulate the 'rest and digest' parasympathetic state.
- **Cold water therapy** - a 3-minute cold shower or plunge twice a day has immeasurable gut healing benefits.

Lastly, be patient! Impatience creates a state of tense resistance, stagnation and holding on. Let go!



Why Your Position Matters

Before the invention of modern toilet, humans used to squat when they needed to go. This meant the knees were up high and the hips were low. The perfect position for the straight alignment of the spine and coccyx and for the bowels to open.

So if you have ever felt the urgent need to relieve yourself but sat on the toilet only to find you can't go, you may find adjusting your toilet position helpful.

To do this, simply place your feet on a stool or a stack of books so that your knees are higher than your hips. And rather than leaning forward, keep your back straight.

Be patient! Put on some calming tunes, close your eyes, breathe and visualise the waste moving through your colon.



Proper Nutrition Is Key

Proper nutrition is still a confusing subject for so many. But it doesn't have to be!

Proper nutrition means eating only 'WHOLE FOODS' prepared by nature. No packaged or heavily processed foods!

Eat whole - unprocessed - foods:

- Protein: beef, lamb, game, organ meats, poultry and eggs from grass fed animals and bone broth.
- Wild fish (not farmed), fish eggs and shellfish from un-polluted waters.
- Full-fat milk products (if tolerated) from grass fed cows, sheep, goat - preferably raw and/or fermented - milk, whole yogurt, kefir, cultured butter, full-fat raw cheeses and fresh and sour cream.
- Animal fats, lard, tallow, egg yolks, cream, ghee and butter.



Proper Nutrition Is Key

- Fresh fruit and vegetables - preferably organic - use vegetables in salads, soups or steamed with butter. I talk more about consuming fruit and digestive enzymes on the next page. NO BANANA - can cause constipation.
- Prepared whole grains (in moderation, if tolerated) - oats, legumes and nuts that have been prepared by soaking, sprouting or sour leavening to neutralise phytic acid, enzyme inhibitors and other anti-nutrients.
- Fermented vegetables, condiments and kefir (in moderation, if tolerated)
- Bones broth.
- Celtic sea salt and a variety of fresh herbs and spices.
- Salad dressing using raw vinegar, EVOO, lemon juice and herbs.
- Oils - Extra virgin olive oil, coconut oil, avocado oil. No vegetable / seed oils.



Nutrition, Diet & Fibre

A quick note on nutrition, diet and fibre.

If your diet is insufficient and you are not eating enough - i.e. under eating - then it is possible this is one of the contributing factors for your constipation issues. And will cause you to have very low stool volume. If this is the case, then adding in some extra fibre could be beneficial.

However, if you are eating adequate amounts, but have IBS like symptoms, then it's likely that adding stool volume may worsen the underlying issue, and therefore, one or more of the following intervention's may be more suitable and beneficial.



Digestive Enzymes & Digestion

Naturally occurring digestive enzymes are proteins your body makes and play a key role in breaking down the food you eat.

These proteins speed up chemical reactions that turn nutrients into substances your digestive tract can absorb. Your saliva has digestive enzymes in it. The cells on the surface of your intestines store them. And your pancreas, gallbladder, and liver, also release them.

Different types of enzymes target different nutrients:

- Amylase breaks down carbs and starches
- Protease works on proteins
- Lipase handles fats

I'll outline some specific foods containing these enzymes on the next page.



Natures Digestive Enzymes

Some varieties of fruit - and other foods - contain natural digestive enzymes and eating them can help improve digestion and support motility. The ones I want you to focus on consuming are these:

- **Pineapples** are high in bromelain's and contain a mixture of proteases that help breakdown proteins - use in smoothies, salads, meat marinades, as a condiment or on its own. Buy low acid if needed.
- **Papaya** has a protease called papain which again helps breakdown protein use in smoothies, salads or solo.
- **Kiwi Fruit** contain actinidain which is also a protease and aids digestion.
- **Avocados** contain lipase which can help support the breakdown of fats.
- **Raw honey** has amylase and protease - drizzle over grass fed beef with grass fed butter.



Consuming Enzyme Rich Foods

The enzyme rich foods outlined on the previous page are going to play a significant role in helping to optimise digestion and motility.

Here's some suggestions:

- Pineapple, papaya and kiwi fruit make a great side salad (chopped or diced) - consume before your meal or on an empty stomach - to aid digestion.
- Avocado is a great addition to a smoothie, use as a spread on buckwheat cakes with oily fish or eggs, goat's feta and rocket.
- Raw honey adds an amazing flavour to steak. Serve eye fillet or slow cooked beef brisket with some grass fed butter and a drizzle of raw honey.

Remember, choose foods that optimise nutrition and support digestion.



Optimising Nutrition

If your digestive system doesn't make enough HCL or digestive enzymes, or your liver doesn't produce sufficient bile, digestion will become impaired, and cause a number of intestinal issues: constipation, bloating, stomachache, diarrhoea, gas and more.

The following foods are known to cause an intestinal issues and impair digestion. I highly recommend AVOIDING or at the very least LIMITING these:

- Gluten and grains (including cereals)
- Pasteurised dairy
- Nuts and seeds
- Legumes, pulses, beans and lectins
- Seed and vegetable oils
- Processed sugars
- Coffee and alcohol
- AND limit foods high in FODMAP's and oxalates, especially if they cause significant digestive issues.



Digestion Kick-Start

Weeks 1 - 4

1. Lemon + ACV (Apple Cider Vinegar)

Water: upon rising combine juice of 1 lemon + 1 tablespoon ACV + pinch **Celtic Sea Salt** in 250ml of warm water.

NOTE: Drink, then be sure to brush your teeth so the enamel is not damaged.

2. Breakfast: drink 1 cup of hot bone broth, eat 2-3 kiwifruit (fuzzy skin removed) and finish with healthy protein, fats and bitter greens

(e.g. poached eggs, salmon, rocket or sauteed zucchini, rocket and parmesan omelette)

3. After breakfast: drink 2 x 250 ml glasses filtered water.



Digestion Kick-Start

Week 5 onwards (up to 3 months)

1. Lemon + ACV (Apple Cider Vinegar)

Water: upon rising combine juice of 1 lemon + 1 tablespoon ACV + pinch **Celtic Sea Salt** in 250ml of warm water.

2. Flaxseeds & chia: add 2 tablespoons of ground flaxseeds and 1 teaspoon of chia seeds to a smoothie or natural yoghurt with papaya and/or blueberries.

3. Breakfast: drink 1 cup of hot bone broth + healthy protein, fats and bitter greens

4. After breakfast: drink 2 x 250 ml glasses filtered water.

You shouldn't need to repeat this, but depending on the severity of the issue, go back to the start and repeat until your bowels begin to move spontaneously.



Kiwi Fruit Digestive Smoothie

The high volume of vitamin C in Kiwifruit acts as a natural laxative or osmotic agent that helps draw water into the stool.

Ingredients

- 1 handful of coriander
- 2 kiwifruit, skin removed
- 1 cup pineapple, fresh or frozen
- 1 tablespoon collagen or gelatin
- 1 teaspoon macadamia butter
- 1-2 cups coconut milk, coconut water
OR milk kefir
- 1/4 cup aloe vera juice

Method

- Place ingredients in a blender
- Blend until smooth and serve



Additional Supplements

Electrolytes (link)

Electrolytes are needed for muscular and nervous system functioning, including gastrointestinal muscles. Ensuring adequate electrolytes (especially sodium and potassium) is a must. Add 1-2 servings of a good quality electrolyte supplement daily.

Magnesium (link)

Magnesium calms the central nervous system and relaxes muscles, which aids constipation relief. I suggest starting with magnesium citrate which will pull some additional fluid into the bowel and help stimulate bowel movements. Take 2.5 grams 1-2 times a day. Note: A more aggressive form is magnesium oxide, which has lower bioavailability but a stronger laxative effect.



Additional Supplements

Vitamin C (link)

Using around 5g per day of vitamin C has an osmotic laxative affect. However, long term vitamin C use may affect copper levels, so it's not recommend as an ongoing solution, but as most people have vitamin C in their home it can be easily used for a short term remedy.

Iberogast (link)

Iberogast is blend of a number of different herbs. It's a very effective tool for improving a range of digestive symptoms, from indigestion, to diarrhea, to acid reflux, to constipation. Suggested dose 15-20 drops before meals or 50-60 drops once a day before bed.



Additional Supplements

Lower Bowel Stimulant (link)

Contains 9 herbal ingredients including cascara, buckthorn and liquorice used in Western herbal medicine to:

- Relieve constipation
- Relieve bowel discomfort
- Maintain bowel regularity
- Soften stool to ease bowel movement

Senna (link)

Senna is a natural laxative that works by stimulating nerves. This can be a bit stronger and more of an irritant, as such it should only really be used for extreme cases of constipation. It can be taken one of two ways. As a capsule 1 per day (link above) or as Senna Tea.

NOTE: Take Senna only when needed and do not take for more than seven (7) consecutive days.



Mag + C Bowel Optimiser

Supplemental forms of magnesium and vitamin C can act as osmotic agents that draw water into the bowel. This bulks and softens stools, making it easier to pass.

While traditional laxatives may have worked in the past, they are not natural products and have many listed side effects.

Long term use can worsen symptoms and cause even more damage. And you can also become dependent on them, making your bowels become lazy.

On the next page you will find the Mag + C Bowel Optimiser recommended dosage.

The two natural supplements (not laxatives) below can be used together to achieve a daily bowel movement.



Mag + C Bowel Optimiser

Each of these products on there own is not enough for someone struggling with chronic constipation, but together are a great tool to get things moving, taking about 3 days before they start to kick in.

Natural protocol to achieve a well-formed daily bowel movement:

Supplement: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

+

Magnesium Citrate 2-3 capsules
(150mg per capsule)

Vitamin C + Flavonoids 1-2 capsules
(500mg of Vit C per capsule)

* Titration: introduce each product separately and slowly to avoid or minimise any supplement reactions or symptom flares.

Magnesium and vitamin C are best taken with a full glass of water at least 30 minutes before or 1 or more hours after meals. We recommend discussing all supplements with your practitioner before use to ensure they are right for you.



Additional Recommendations

- **ACV (Apple Cider Vinegar):** 1 tablespoon ACV in 1/4 cup water before each meal and before bed.
- **Hydration and electrolytes:** aim to consume no less than 2.5 litres/12 x 250ml glasses a day. To boost electrolytes and essential minerals, add 1/4 teaspoon **Salt of the Earth Celtic Sea Salt** and juice of 1 lime to a glass of water. Coconut water is also great for hydration and electrolytes if you're not sensitive to FODMAP's.
- **Ginger tea:** add 1-2 teaspoons of freshly grated ginger in a cup of warm water is also great for settling the stomach and encouraging the peristaltic process. Ginger also stimulates digestive enzymes and soothes the stomach and gut lining.
- **Herbal teas:** Peppermint eases stomach cramps, reduces flatulence and relaxes the digestive tract. Cinnamon reduces bloating and gas. Lemon stimulates the digestive tract.
- **Stewed green apples:** high in pectin, which is great for the digestive system and can help support proper function. Also helps regulate blood sugar and is delicious for breakfast with natural yoghurt.
- **Olive oil:** a teaspoon of organic extra virgin olive oil in the morning on an empty stomach can help soften the stool. The oil acts as a lubricant.
- **Prune juice/dried prunes:** one of the more traditional remedies for constipation. Prune juice lacks the fibre of the dried fruit but both are high in sorbitol content, which acts as a laxative.





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Nutritional Therapy + Functional Gut Healing
+ Embodied Health Transformation

