



Constipation

Constipation is a reduction in your normal bowel habits, and is quite common in pregnancy because the hormone, progesterone, relaxes and slows down the movement of your guts (intestines). If you have a tendency to constipation when you are not pregnant it is likely to be worse during pregnancy, especially if you are frequently being sick and unable to eat a proper diet.

Tips for coping with constipation

- Drink plenty of water – at least two litres a day. This adds water to the stools, making them softer and easier to pass. Start your day with a cup of boiled water with a slice of lemon in it – before you have anything else to eat or drink
- Avoid drinking too much tea – about three cups a day is the recommended maximum – as the tannin can reduce the gut movement and worsen constipation. Herbal teas or caffeine free teas such as rooibos (redbush) are better. Avoid other drinks which increase urination such as coffee, cola and alcohol (best avoided in pregnancy anyway)
- Eat plenty of food which is high in fibre (roughage) and vitamin C, including whole oranges, grapefruits, tangerines and blackcurrants, dried prunes and apricots, celery, watercress, cabbage, spinach and artichokes. However, avoid excessive amounts of fruit juice, which does not contain the roughage of the whole fruit and the acidity can lead to other problems such as heartburn and cystitis.
- If you like garlic, use plenty in your cooking, preferably peeled but left whole, not chopped or crushed – this enables you to obtain plenty of the active ingredients without getting an after-taste and garlicky breath!
- Bran (and bran cereals) should be eaten with caution, as it bulks up the stool, which becomes hard and immovable unless you drink plenty of fluid at the same time. Excessive amounts of bran can also interfere with your body's ability to absorb vitamins and minerals from your food.

- When you are sitting on the toilet, try to breathe deeply, then exhale, allowing your pelvic floor muscles to relax but try not to strain. Standing up to pass the stool can sometimes help – have one knee bent and put your foot on a stool or the edge of the bath, if nearby.
- Some iron tablets prescribed for anaemia cause constipation. If you are anaemic, try an iron-rich water such as Spatone™, or take Floradix™, herbal supplement, and eat extra red meat and dark green vegetables
- Herbal remedies include dandelion or mallow tea, made from the leaves of the plants, steeped in boiling water and drunk daily. Senna is a traditional remedy for constipation but is rather purgative and may be too strong for you during your pregnancy.
- Psyllium husks can be useful for constipation, particularly if you have irritable bowel syndrome. However, you should avoid psyllium if you are taking heart medication
- Reflexology – a simple technique is to massage the arches of your feet – which, in reflexology, relate to the digestive system – in a circular, clockwise motion, for about five minutes on each foot.



Some homeopathic remedies which may be useful for constipation

Try NUX VOMICA if you

- pass stools which are large and hard
- constantly feel the need to have your bowels open but have an unfinished feeling
- have associated backache
- feel worse if you drink water
- are nervy, irritable, quarrelsome & a “workaholic”

Try SEPIA if you

- pass stools which are large and hard
- have a bloated feeling in your tummy
- feel as if there is a round ball in your anus
- pass a lot of urine at night (more than normal!)
- feel worse at lunchtime, in the evening & when you are alone
- feel better if you get some exercise
- are indifferent but snappy
- feel weary & worn out

Try PULSATILLA if you

- pass stools which are sometimes greenish-yellow & sometimes watery or slimy
- have indigestion

- feel worse if you get overheated & at night
- feel better after eating & in the fresh air
- are changeable in mood, tearful or laughing, emotional

Try LYCOPODIUM if you

- pass stools which are hard and knotty
- have a lot of wind & an unfinished feeling
- feel worse in a hot room & between 1600-2000 hours
- feel better if you have a warm drink
- are anxious & lack self-confidence but put on a good “front”

Try GRAPHITES if you

- pass stools which are large, with mucus & a sour smell
- pass a lot of urine at night which smells sour
- feel worse when cold & at night
- feel chilly, apprehensive & tearful

Try CAUSTICUM if you

- pass soft stools but have to strain a lot
- get stitch-like tummy pains
- feel as if there is a pressure in your rectum
- feel worse in cold draughts
- feel better if you stand up to pass the stool
- feel pessimistic, as if you will never get better, cry easily

Try PHOSPHORUS if you

- pass long thin tough stools
- can only pass a stool with difficulty
- feel debilitated but have no pain
- have ice-cold hands & feet
- feel worse if you get chilled but better if you eat cold foods
- feel better in the morning
- need a lot of sympathy when you are ill but are easily reassured

Try KALI CARB if you

- pass large hard stools
- get pain before you pass a stool & have an unfinished feeling afterwards
- feel worse if you drink coffee and at 0300 hours
- feel better on a warm day
- are touchy, irritable & highly strung but sluggish at the same time

Always inform your midwife if you are using any natural remedies or receiving treatment from a complementary therapist

For more individualised advice on coping with constipation, call Expectancy on **0906 400 6227** (calls charged at £1.50 per minute, from a BT landline; calls from mobiles and other networks may vary)