



## Opioid-Induced Constipation (OIC)



### Overview

This form of constipation is linked to opioids. It's a common problem for patients who manage pain with these drugs.

### Causes

Why does it happen? Opioids affect your digestive tract. They reduce digestive juices. They slow down the process of digestion, which allows more liquids to be absorbed. Your stools become dry and hard. Opioids also affect muscles in the rectum, making it harder for you to push out stools.

### Symptoms

What are the symptoms? Well, having a bowel movement becomes difficult. You strain, and your stools may be hard and lumpy. And you may have fewer bowel movements than you're used to. A person who normally has a movement every day may start having them fewer than three times per week. This is a problem. Over time, your stools become even harder and more difficult to pass.

### Treatment

How do we treat it? It helps to drink more fluids and get more fiber in your diet. So eat things like prunes and bran. Avoid fatty, processed meats and caffeine. Instead of three large meals, eat several small meals during the day. And get daily exercise. If these aren't helpful, we may recommend over-the-counter or prescription medications.

### Conclusion

It's not always easy to talk to your doctor about constipation. You may be embarrassed. But constipation is a problem that can be treated. You can get relief and still be able to take your pain medication. Speak up so you get the care you need.