Patient information: Constipation in adults (The Basics)

What is constipation? — Constipation is a common problem that makes it hard to have bowel movements. Your bowel movements might be: 1 too hard 2 Too small 3 Hard to get out 4 Happening fewer than 3 times a week

What causes constipation? — Constipation can be caused by: side effects of some medicines, Poor diet. ●Diseases of the digestive system

What other symptoms should I watch for? — These symptoms could signal a more serious problem: Blood in the toilet or on the toilet paper after having a bowel movement, Fever, Weight loss, Feeling weak

Is there anything I can do on my own to get rid of constipation? — Yes. Try these steps: Eat foods that have a lot of fiber. Good choices are fruits, vegetables, prune juice, and cereal (table 1). Drink plenty of water and other fluids. When you feel the need to go to the bathroom, go to the bathroom. Don't hold it. Take laxatives. These are medicines that help make bowel movements easier to get out. Some are pills that you swallow. Others go into the rectum. These are called "suppositories."

How is constipation treated? — That depends on what is causing your constipation. First, your doctor will want you to try eating more fiber with water. If that doesn't help try otc meds like milk of magnesia, miralax, senna or various suppositories (medicines that you put in your rectum) ●A treatment called an "enema." —Biofeedback. This is a technique that teaches you to relax your muscles so you can let go and push bowel movements out.

Can constipation be prevented? — You can reduce your chances of getting constipation again by: ●Eating a diet that is full of fiber, ●Drinking water and other fluids during the day, ●Going to the bathroom at regular times every day

Patient information: Hemorrhoids (The Basics)

What are hemorrhoids? — Hemorrhoids are swollen veins in the rectum. They can cause itching and pain. Sometimes they can also make you bleed during a bowel movement. In some cases, you can see or feel hemorrhoids around the outside of the rectum. In other cases, you cannot see them because they are hidden inside the rectum

What can I do to keep from getting more hemorrhoids? — The most important thing you can do is to keep from getting constipated. You should have a bowel movement at least a few times a week. When you have a bowel movement, you also should not have to push too much. Plus, your bowel movements should not be too hard. Being constipated and having hard bowel movements can make hemorrhoids worse. Here are some steps you can take to avoid getting constipated or having hard stools:

Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. They have fiber, which helps to increase bowel movements. Take fiber powders, wafers, or pills. You should get 20 to 35 grams of fiber a day. Take medicines called stool softeners such as docusate sodium (sample brand names: Colace, Dulcolax) or bulk forming laxatives. Bulk forming laxatives include psyllium seed (sample brand names: Metamucil, Konsyl), methylcellulose (brand name: Citrucel), calcium polycarbophil (sample brand name: FiberCon), and wheat dextran (brand name: Benefiber). These medicines increase the number of bowel movements you have. They are safe to take and they can prevent problems later.

What can I do to reduce my symptoms? — Some people feel better if they soak their buttocks (sitz bath) in 2 or 3 inches of warm water. You can do this up to 2 to 3 times a day for 10 to 15 minutes. Do not add soap, bubble bath, or anything to the water. There are also medicines that you can get without a prescription. They are usually creams or ointments that you rub on your anus to relieve pain, itching, and swelling. Some hemorrhoid medicines come in a capsule (called a suppository) that you put inside your rectum. Others come in a cream that comes in a bottle with a nozzle that you put inside your rectum. It is OK to try these medicines. But do not use medicines that have hydrocortisone (a steroid medicine) for more than a week, unless your doctor or nurse approves.

What if the self-care steps do not work? — If you still have symptoms after trying the steps listed above, you might need treatments to destroy or remove the hemorrhoids. One popular treatment is called "rubber band ligation." For this treatment, the doctor ties tiny rubber bands around the hemorrhoids. A few days later the hemorrhoids shrink and fall off. The doctor can also use lasers, heat, or chemicals to destroy hemorrhoids. But if none of these options works, there is always surgery to remove the hemorrhoids.

Patient information: High-fiber diet (The Basics)

What is fiber? — Fiber is a substance found in some fruits, vegetables, and grains. Most fiber passes through your body without being digested. But it can affect how you digest other foods, and it can also improve your bowel movements. There are 2 kinds of fiber. One kind is called "soluble fiber" and is found in fruits, oats, barley, beans, and peas. The other kind is called "insoluble fiber," and is found in wheat, rye, and other grains. Both kinds of fiber that you eat are called "dietary fiber."

Why is fiber important to my health? — Fiber can help make your bowel movements softer and more regular. Adding fiber to your diet can help with problems including constipation, hemorrhoids, and diarrhea. Plus, it can help prevent "accidents" if you have trouble controlling your bowel movements. Getting enough fiber can also help lower your risk of heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. That's because fiber can help lower cholesterol and help control blood sugar.

How much fiber do I need? — The recommended amount of fiber is 20 to 35 grams a day. The nutrition label on packaged foods can show you how much fiber you are getting in each serving.

How can I make sure I'm getting enough fiber? — To make sure that you're getting enough fiber, eat plenty of the fruits, vegetables, and grains that contain. Many breakfast cereals also have a lot of fiber. If you can't get enough fiber from food, you can add wheat bran to the foods you do eat. Or you can get fiber supplements (table 2). These often come in a powder and should be added to water or another liquid.

What are the side effects of fiber? — When you start eating more fiber, your belly might feel bloated, or you might have gas or cramps. You can avoid these side effects by adding fiber to your diet slowly. Some people feel worse when they eat more fiber or take fiber supplements. This is true for some people who have certain digestive problems, such as irritable bowel syndrome or diverticulosis. If you feel worse after adding more fiber to your diet, you can try decreasing the amount of fiber to see if that helps.