

Constipation: Tibb tactics worth trying

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Overview

Elimination of natural waste is one of the major Tibb Lifestyle Factors. Food and drink are consumed, and the residue remaining when all beneficial material has been assimilated into the body is excreted, mainly in the stool. Constipation happens when the bowel movements are infrequent for the person affected, and the stool eventually passed is small, dry, hard, and very dark in colour. It often comes with pain, intense straining, a swollen abdomen and a bloated feeling. In most cases it arises from a faulty lifestyle, especially regarding food, low fluid intake, and lack of attention to the natural regular urge to opening the bowels. If not treated properly, piles (*haemorrhoids*) or anal fissures, and in severe cases hernias, often develop. Effective treatment comes from modifying the sufferer's lifestyle. For Tibb, this means consuming more high-fibre foodstuffs, drinking more water and other fluids, increasing physical activity, and changing toilet habits. Herbal laxatives can be brought in to help the excretory process. In this article, constipation in adults is examined, and the Tibb and other ways of counteracting it provided.

What is constipation?

The time between bowel movements varies from person to person: everyone's temperament is different. It can be three times a day or it can be once or twice weekly. Most people know they are constipated when the bowel movement becomes infrequent; but more importantly, when the stool passed eventually is hard, small and painful. This difficult period is mercifully short-lived for most, but for some it may last for several weeks, and often longer. This now begins to badly affect the sufferer's quality of life. On top of this, the continuing constipation may be a symptom of a more serious condition – bowel obstruction, irritable bowel syndrome or even a growth.

Constipation is usually short-lived. However, health care advice should be sought if any of these occur:

- **Constipation lasts longer than two weeks**
- **Bowel movements are very painful**
- **Blood appears in the stool**
- **Unexplained weight loss becomes evident**

What causes constipation?

Peristalsis is the process by which the food we swallow moves along the digestive tract by regular rhythmic contractions and relaxations in sequence of the involuntary muscles encircling the gut. Constipation develops when this harmonious process is disturbed, so that the food remaining in the digestive tract moves along too slowly. In Tibb,

this leads to a drop in the qualities of heat and moistness, so making the waste hard and dry. This process is under the control of Physis, the body's inner doctor.

There are numerous ways the harmony of this critically important process can be disturbed, leading to constipation.

The most common source of constipation is a faulty lifestyle.

- **Food and drink:** Not enough insoluble fibre in the food we consume. Also, eating too much dairy produce.
- **Water intake:** Not enough water drunk, coupled with irregular eating habits.
- **Mental factors:** Unresolved mental and emotional stress encourages constipation.
- **Physical activity:** A sedentary lifestyle, general sluggishness and being bed-ridden increases the chance of constipation.
- **Poor elimination:** Repeatedly ignoring 'the call of nature', due to painful piles, for example, can bring on constipation.
- **Eating habits:** 'Eating on the run', irregular eating times due to traveling and/or working hours.

Other causes of constipation are:

- **Medications:** Several have been linked to constipation:
 - Conventional drugs: Strong painkillers (*morphine; codeine*) and some anti-depressants.
 - Laxatives: Overuse of some of these can lead to dehydration and on to constipation.
 - Minerals: antacids containing aluminium or calcium, and iron supplements for treating anaemia.
- **Physical disorders:**
 - Pregnancy – the sheer pressure from the developing foetus affects the lower bowel's peristalsis.
 - Sleep problems – these prevent Physis from carrying out one of its major roles, the elimination of natural waste.
 - Recent surgery – especially on the lower gut, such as piles.
 - Gut disorders – irritable bowel syndrome, bowel obstruction, cancer of the colon, for example.
 - Other disorders – thyroid problems and Parkinson's disease; extreme diets; depression.

The Tibb view on constipation

According to Tibb, constipation is associated with the qualities of **coldness with dryness, usually** due to an improper lifestyle. A major contributor to this is eating too many cold and dry foods, which results in body waste moving slowly through the digestive tract, leading to the excretion of small, dry and hard stools. Although people with a melancholic dominant/sub-dominant temperament are mostly likely to develop constipation due to their innate qualities of coldness and dryness, other temperamental types can also suffer from constipation due to a faulty diet. Treatment is aimed at assisting Physis in restoring harmony, by reducing excess coldness and dryness. This is achieved by implementing a number of Tibb Lifestyle Factors which increase the qualities of heat and moistness.

Constipation is common in children, especially babies and infants. As this is an acute condition which is largely independent of lifestyle and habit, a competent health care provider should be consulted, certainly for very young cases.

Easing constipation the Tibb way

Constipation can be prevented by adopting a number of simple habits:

- **Obey your Physis:** When the natural urge for a bowel movement arises, do not ignore it, but respond to it.
- **Eat a well-balanced diet:** Boost your food intake with plenty of Hot and Moist foods such as dates, seasonal fruits (e.g. mangoes) and vegetables (e.g. celery and red pepper), and brown or wholegrain bread. The fibre contained in these foods bulks up the stool, easing its passage along the gut.
- **Increase water intake:** Drink warm water and beverages (8 to ten glasses throughout the day) regularly. Avoid high-caffeine and milky drinks until the constipation clears up.
- **Increase physical activity:** Exercise regularly, but not excessively. Moderate intensity such as a 20-minute brisk walk helps.
- **Emotional support:** If stress is suspected as an aggravating factor, then regular Tibb breathing exercises are recommended. Also, actively relaxing during a bowel movement helps.
- **Avoid:** Processed foods in general, **and** Cold and Dry items such as beans, citrus fruits, beef and yogurt. Fried and spicy foods should be shunned, as should salty and sugary products, and alcoholic beverages.
- **Start the day:** A glass of warm water containing some honey and olive oil should be taken on rising.

Additional measures which contribute to constipation relief are:

- Using a mild natural **herbal laxative** – but avoid overuse, as this causes problems.
- Boost **fibre intake** with bran, especially in breakfast cereals.
- Use a **stool softener** such as lactulose, sorbitol or mannitol as instructed on the package, as these increase the liquid content of the stool.
- Avoid **artificial sweeteners** and other chemical additives present in food if possible.
- Adopt the age-old **squatting position** on the toilet, by placing the feet on a low box or stool.

Herbal and other products for relieving constipation

Every community has its own time-proven way of relieving constipation: fruits such as prunes, raisins, lemons, figs and pears; herbs such psyllium, senna, cascara and aloe. Other traditional remedies include flax seed and castor oil.

Tibb remedies for constipation

Laxotabs: This natural herbal laxative is associated with qualities of *moistness with heat*, which combat the coldness and dryness typical of constipation. It acts to soften the faeces, so easing the passage of stool along the gut. Rebound diarrhoea and dehydration are not likely, as the fluid content of the gut is unaffected.

Bonnycare syrup: This is associated with qualities of *heat with moistness*, and is mainly for infants and children. It supports the digestive function by helping to restore the normal workings of the bowel. It is also effective in dealing with excessive flatulence.

Summary

Repeated bouts of constipation can have a devastating effect on the sufferer's quality of life. Most cases can be laid at the doors of a faulty way of life and bad habits. Tibb accepts this, and so has traditionally included the effective elimination of natural waste as a major Lifestyle Factor. As adverse changes in the person's qualitative balance are the source of repeated constipation, Tibb's treatment of constipation is geared up to restore normal harmony in these qualities, taking temperament into account. Central to treatment (and prevention) is switching to a high-fibre diet incorporating vegetables and fruits supplemented by increased water and other liquid intake, increasing daily physical activity, using other herbal and natural remedies, and making changes to personal habits and toilet routine.

Further Reading

Tibb treatment of constipation: www.tibb.co.za/ailments.html

Overview on constipation: <http://patient.info/health/constipation-in-adults-leaflet>

Physis and healing: www.tibb.co.za/articles/Physis%20The%20best%20friend%20within%20.pdf

Healing with Tibb (download) (p.46): www.tibb.co.za/healing-with-tibb.pdf