

ALS & CONSTIPATION

The bowel and bladder are not typically affected by ALS.¹ However, some people with ALS may experience constipation, which is defined as infrequent bowel movements—usually three times a week or less. Though each person’s “regular” is a little different, both frequency and consistency of bowel movements are important.

Regular digestion and elimination are important aspects of the body’s overall health. When constipation becomes an ongoing problem, it can decrease a person’s appetite and lead to decreased food intake, weight loss, and malnutrition, all of which can be detrimental to health.



If you are experiencing constipation, speak with your healthcare team to come up with a treatment plan.



What are the causes of constipation in people living with ALS?

There are many factors that contribute to constipation in people living with ALS, including:

- Decreased physical activity due to decrease in muscle strength.
- Decreased dietary fibre intake because of changes in food choices, or difficulty chewing and swallowing.
- Decreased fluid intake because of difficulty swallowing liquids.
- Weakness in the abdominal and/or pelvic muscles, slowing the process of emptying of the bowel.
- Side effects from various medications such as those used to control saliva or pain.



What can people living with ALS do to reduce constipation?

Managing constipation needs a broad and individualized approach that targets hydration, diet, mealtimes, bowel routines, and medications. A team-based approach may address the following:

- Improve hydration by increasing intake of nonalcoholic beverages, including water, juice, and milk.
- Increase fibre intake with whole grain products (bread and cereals, pasta, brown rice), vegetables, fruits, legumes (dried peas, beans and lentils), and fibre supplements (bran, psyllium).
- Regular mealtimes and routines.
- A thorough medication review to identify any medications that may be causing constipation.
- It may be necessary to discuss the use of laxatives with your doctor to help manage bowel regularity

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- Constipation can affect people with ALS for a number of reasons, including lowered physical activity, dietary factors, muscle weakness, and medications.
- Regular digestion and elimination are important in your body's overall health and that each person's "regular" is a little different.
- Discuss any concerns about constipation with your healthcare team so that a complete treatment plan can be started!

KNOW THAT WE ARE HERE TO HELP

The ALS Society of Canada can assist in connecting people and families living with ALS in Ontario to support services, equipment, and ALS clinics. We also invest in the most promising Canadian ALS research, advocate federally and provincially for the needs of people affected by ALS, and provide information to empower Canadians affected by the disease. Learn more at www.als.ca where you can also find more resources in the "What is ALS?" section.

If you live outside of Ontario, please contact your provincial ALS Society for information on support available in your region.

Sources

1 Nature Reviews Disease Primers. 2017 Oct 5;3:17071.

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