

Chinese Medicine and Constipation

Most conventional treatments for relieving constipation usually either try to change the stool (bulk formers or stool softeners) or artificially stimulate or lubricate your intestines. This offers you nothing in the way of permanently relieving constipation, so you have to keep using them. By comparison, Chinese methods seek to correct the underlying malfunction by strengthening the functioning of your intestines (peristalsis), rather than just stimulating them, or by correcting the reason your stool (and intestines) are too dry and need lubrication in the first place. Chinese remedies relieve constipation by correcting the functioning of your body, not by trying to change the stool, lube the intestines or give you some other temporary fix.

Avoiding the causes of constipation

To get over your constipation once and for all, you have to stop whatever behavior caused it in the first place, and that's causing it to continue. If you are shocked to hear that you may have caused your constipation, understand this: constipation is caused. It doesn't just happen. You may have a predisposition towards it, but it's something you're doing, or have done in the past, that's causing it to be a problem.

The Causes Of Constipation

- Wrong diet
 - Some foods "dry up" the fluid of your intestines and stools causing "dry stool" constipation, so if your stools are dry, avoid:
 - Spicy hot foods
 - Alcohol
 - Beef
 - Lamb
 - Shrimp
 - Ginseng (from Asian, not American)
 - Other foods can cause your intestines to lose energy for peristalsis, causing constipation with long, thin stools, so if your stools are long and thin ("pencil-shaped"), avoid:
 - Cold foods
 - Iced foods
 - Raw foods
 - Sweet foods
 - Dairy
 - Obviously, lack of fiber is a major cause of constipation, too. The items below will provide plenty of fiber, nutrition and works best for most people:
 - Cooked vegetables
 - Cooked whole grains
 - Small amounts of animal protein
 - Room temperature water or green tea
- Too strong of emotions, stress or mental over-work
 - Anger, worry, resentment, frustration, and over-thinking all slow the movement of the stools through your intestines causing constipation. There's no better technique to resolve these emotions than meditation. Acupuncture and exercise also help to reduce stress.
- Too little exercise
 - Exercise stimulates peristalsis, and lack of this is one of the common causes of constipation. If you're looking for exercise that's particularly beneficial for your overall health, try Tai Chi, Qigong, yoga or swimming.
- Physical over-work
 - Overwork weakens your body's muscles and your intestines ability to transport the stools, causing constipation. Long years of overwork may also affect your kidney function, causing internal dryness and constipation from dry stools. Exercise will help, but avoid overexertion.
- Childbirth
 - Having children can have a similar effect as physical overwork and can deplete your body, especially if you are

already in a run down, depleted state. Childbirth takes time to recover from, so you must eat nutritious foods, get appropriate exercise and rest to strengthen your body.

- High fever
 - High fever, particularly from a cold or flu, can "dry up" your body fluids, leading to constipation with dry stools. In this case, you'll probably have some abdominal pain and notice symptoms of dryness like dry mouth, thirst, etc.

Foods That Cause Constipation

Although lack of fiber is an important cause of constipation in modern society, foods that cause constipation are well known in Chinese medicine but not understood in conventional medicine. It's not as simple as just avoiding a group of foods. The foods that cause constipation are different for everyone.

First, understand the "temperature of food. Chinese medicine categorizes foods according to temperature; this doesn't mean actual temperature, but their effect of "cooling" or "heating" your body. Just as heat dries water, "hot" foods have a tendency to dry up fluids in your body. Just as extreme cold slows movement in nature, "cold" foods have a tendency to slow down movement in your body. "Hot" foods cause constipation by drying up the fluids of your body, leaving you with dry stools that cannot be moved properly. "Cold" foods slow functioning in the body. Since transportation of food or stools through the intestines is not passive – it is an active function – then these "cold" foods decrease your ability to transport and cause constipation.

Next, understand your body's temperature. Foods do not inherently cause constipation on their own. If your system is already "hot" (you feel warm or thirsty, have hard and dry stools, your breath is bad, your irritable and you possibly have mouth ulcers) then "hot" foods will affect you more and may cause constipation. If your system is already "cold" (you feel cold, sluggish, speak and move slowly, have abdominal pain that feels better with heat), then cold foods will cause you more harm. It's important to understand that, while a "hot" food may cause constipation in an already "hot" person, it may cure constipation in a "cold" person, and vice-versa.

Foods That Relieve Constipation

Once you understand foods that cause constipation, you need to understand the foods that relieve constipation. But rather than thinking of specific foods that relieve constipation, you need to understand how to eat. It sounds like a subtle difference, but that determines whether you'll ever get over your constipation or not. Although a specific food might relieve the constipation you have today, it may further weaken your body and make your constipation even worse.

There are different types of constipation. One is due to dryness (a.k.a. "heat") of the intestines. Another is due to weakness (a.k.a. "cold") of your digestion/elimination organs, resulting in too little energy to move the stools. Take prune juice as an example: Prune juice does move your bowels, but it's very sweet, and very sweet foods weaken your digestion/elimination. So, if your constipation is due to a weakness (rather than dryness) the prune juice will cause your constipation problem to be even worse in the future. The best foods that relieve constipation are the ones that regulate your body to function properly, and take care of the constipation once and for all.

Food Therapy for Constipation

Note - Since there's different types of constipation, this is a "balanced" method that works pretty well for just about everybody, regardless of whether your constipation is due to dryness, weakness, stagnation or other types. Here goes...

Eat a diet of:

- Fresh, lightly cooked vegetables (a big variety). Do not eat raw vegetables. This should be the largest part of your diet.
- Beans
- Whole grains (but avoid wheat). Eat more vegetables than grains
- Eat small amounts of animal protein (2 or 3 oz. per day). Think of it as a flavoring for your meals, rather than the main course.
- Drink room temperature or warm water
- Limit everything else to only small amounts.
- Even though some doctors recommend large amounts of fruit for constipation, the Chinese discovered differently. Despite

it's high fiber content eating lots of fruit can weaken the digestion/elimination for many people, due to its sweetness, particularly if your stools tend to be long, thin and not dry.

- You probably already know that your foods should be natural, not processed, and organic whenever possible (more for your overall health than just constipation).
- Specific foods that are good for constipation are: cabbage, beans, coconut, asparagus, oat bran, rice bran, papaya, black sesame seeds, sweet potatoes, figs, wheat bran, spinach, sesame seeds, pears, peaches, apricots, pine nuts, beets, banana, honey, prunes, apples, walnuts, almonds, cauliflower, okra, carrots, mulberries, pork

Additional recommendations...

- Eat cooked and warm foods, not raw or straight out of the fridge
- Avoid "sweet" tasting food
- Avoid cold foods and drinks
- Eat very little greasy or oily food
- Avoid alcohol
- Avoid dairy
- Avoid caffeine
- Avoid yeast
- Avoid boxed, packaged and processed foods
- Drink about a teacup of warm water with meals. Green tea is okay if your stools are not dry, but avoid tea if you have dry stools. (Tea is a diuretic; it dries you out.)
- Moderate use of spices like ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg and pepper are ordinarily beneficial, but in excess they create too much "heat" in your intestines if you have "dry stool" type of constipation.

Avoid:

- Eating late at night
- Eating in a hurry
- Overeating
- Eating while stressed

Abdominal Massage For Constipation

First, some "Avoids" for abdominal massage

- Don't do it within 2 hours after a meal.
- Don't do it while your bladder is full.
- Avoid it if you have a hernia or ulcer.
- Avoid abdominal massage if you have internal bleeding or inflammation of your lower abdomen.
- Don't do it if you're pregnant or menstruating.
- Don't do it if you have high blood pressure.
- Avoid any excessively tender areas

Although Oriental medicine has several different and sophisticated ways to perform it, here's an effective and simple method to use that works for most people. And it is...

1. Lay on your back with your knees slightly drawn up (this relaxes your abdomen).
2. Lubricate your hands with massage or vegetable oil
3. Use your palms (or flats of your fingers) to make clockwise motions around your navel. Place your hands on your abdomen, below your ribcage, but above your navel. Gently massage towards your left, then down towards your left hip, then along your lower abdomen towards your right hip, then back up the right side of your abdomen. Don't go counter-clockwise. That can help diarrhea, but may make your constipation worse.

It's pretty simple, but don't think that makes it less effective than a much more complex procedure. Used along with other Oriental

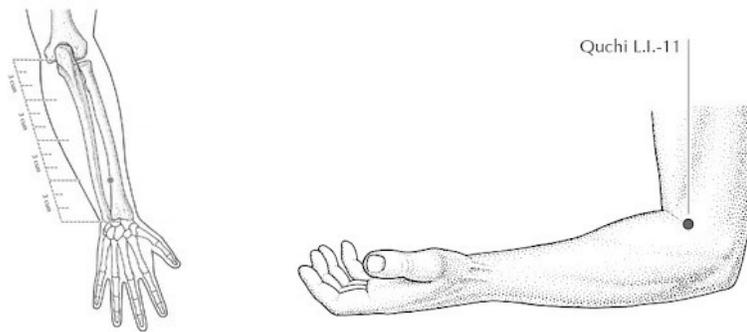
medicine techniques, it's worked well for many of my patients, even when drugs and other therapies have failed. Abdominal massage for constipation regulates peristalsis and helps your energy ("Qi") to move. Combined with other methods (such as Chinese Food Therapy and acupressure), it can help you get over the most difficult constipation for good so you don't need laxatives and stool softeners.

Acupressure for Constipation

Apply medium pressure (never painful), for a minimum 60 seconds / 3 X day, with your finger, thumb or knuckle to:

SJ 6 Approximately one-quarter of the way up the back of your arm from the crease of your wrist.

LI 11 At your elbow crease, just lateral to the big tendon in the center of the crease (locate with your palm up).



Home Remedies For Constipation

These home remedies for constipation are more likely to be a temporary fix. To get over constipation once and for all, make lifestyle changes, including regular and consistent acupuncture treatments, exercise and dietary changes.

- While sitting on the toilet, do deep abdominal breathing, contracting and expanding your lower abdomen. This massages your intestines to stimulate peristalsis.
- Laugh a lot (watch comedy on TV, or whatever else it takes). Laughing massages your intestines to stimulate bowel movements.
- Drink 2 cups of warm water, followed by a 10-minute walk, about 20 - 30 minutes before breakfast everyday.
- Maintain the same bathroom schedule everyday, 20 minutes before breakfast (even if you can't have a bowel movement, still go through the actions).
- Lubricate your intestines by eating walnuts, sesame seeds and/or peanuts
- Significantly limit excess meat and dairy products

Natural Remedies For Constipation

- Use a teaspoon of psyllium (a bulk-forming laxative available at drugstores) with meals. Add the teaspoonful to a glass of water or juice and stir thoroughly before drinking. For psyllium to work properly and to prevent side effects, you must drink at least 8 ounces of liquid when you take it.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Fluid softens and expands the fiber you're already eating, causing it to form bulk in your colon, which triggers the urge have a bowel movement.
- Sit on the toilet for 10 minutes at the same time every day. Do it either 1.) Following a cup of warm water before breakfast; or 2.) Shortly after breakfast every day. You can train yourself to have a bowel movement. It's important to stay relaxed while you do this.

- Eat rhubarb stalk or drink the rhubarb juice. Rhubarb works as a purgative and has lots of fiber. Experiment with a small amount first, as it can be powerful. If the juice tastes too bad, mix in other juices. Warning: Don't eat the leaves: they're toxic. Also, don't use it if you've had kidney stones.
- Avoid tea, coffee, alcohol, cheese and milk. The tea, coffee and alcohol dehydrate you and can dry out your intestines. The cheese and milk have casein that clogs your intestines.
- Demulcent herbs: marshmallow root, flax seed, fenugreek seed, psyllium seed, licorice root
- Laxative herbs: dandelion root, rhubarb root, cascara bark, barberry bark
- Exercise. It helps your bowels to work properly.
- Never ignore the urge to have a bowel movement. If you do, you teach your body not to have one.
- Eat lots of fiber. Soluble fiber from fruits, beans and grains, is effective. Some choices include apples, prunes, oatmeal, brown rice, wheat germ and figs.
- Take ground Flax seed. It contains essential fatty acids, which are needed for proper digestion and stool formation.
- Use Acidophilus. It returns friendly bacteria to the small intestine that may have been destroyed by antibiotics, anti-inflammatories or other reasons.