Constipation in older adults occurs for the same reasons that it occurs in younger adults. Inadequate fluid and fiber intake, lack of exercise, certain medications, physical difficulties or disease can all contribute to constipation.

Due to the aging process, older adults encounter these factors more frequently than younger adults. And, often encounter several of these factors all at one time.

Because constipation can be an indicator of a serious problem, it is important to consult a doctor.

**Poor Diet**
Many older persons eat poorly or experience a loss of appetite. Lower caloric needs, an inability to enjoy the taste of food, depression, widowhood, or financial constraints can all produce a lack of interest in eating or lead to a reliance upon convenience foods.

Medications, especially those that can cause stomach upset, can also result in a loss of appetite. Individuals with dental problems may select soft, highly processed foods that are soft and easy to chew. These foods are likely to be low in dietary fiber.

Whatever the case, a loss of appetite or eating poorly may result in inadequate dietary fiber intake. A low fiber diet will result in constipation.

**Inadequate Fluid Intake**
In an effort to control bladder problems or to reduce the likelihood of having to get up during the night, many older persons will restrict their fluid intake. This is especially problematic if they are also taking laxatives, especially dry fiber laxatives. Dry fiber laxatives can result in dehydration when fluid intake is inadequate. For this reason, individuals who take dry fiber laxatives at night place themselves at extra risk for developing an impaction. Inadequate fluid intake will result in constipation.

**Lack of Exercise, or Lack of Mobility**
Older people may not be able to get exercise every day. This may be due to a lack of suitable activities, fear of becoming injured, fear of falling down, coping with pain such as arthritis, excessive bed rest (such as recovery from illness or injury), fatigue, depression, or anxiety. Without regular exercise or access to physical therapy services, constipation will develop as the intestinal and abdominal muscles become weakened from lack of use.

**Medications & Dietary Supplements**
Many older adults take over-the-counter medications and prescription medications that have constipating side effects. To cope with the constipating side effects, many older adults take laxatives. Some of these individuals develop a dependence upon laxatives in order to have a bowel movement.

Laxative use can create or perpetuate constipation, the very condition they are intended to treat.

**Imaginary Constipation**
Many older people are overly concerned about bowel function, imagining themselves to be constipated when they are not. This could be expected since, due to the aging process their metabolism may be gradually slowing down. This results in reduced intestinal activity and reduced muscle tone which affects regularity.

Additionally older adults may find that their body is functioning differently than it did in the past and this may cause concern. Older adults may be susceptible to advertising for bowel intervention products (laxatives), targeted at the older adult. Many of these ads cause concern about regularity and most ads encourage individuals to self medicate as a solution to their concerns. Individuals who self medicate with laxatives without consulting a physician, can actually cause or worsen constipation and place themselves at serious risk of developing an impaction.

Many older adults imagine themselves to be constipated because they are uninformed about how their own bowel functions.

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Article by Carole Engel
Director of Outreach
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