

Does castor oil help constipation?



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Constipation refers to difficulty passing stools. There is a wide range of natural and conventional treatments available, and castor oil is one powerful option for loosening up stubborn stools.

Castor oil is the oil of the castor plant. The oil is pale yellow and available at most pharmacies and health food stores. Manufacturers sometimes use it to produce soaps, waxes and polishes, plastics, paints, and medicines.

According to a 2014 article in *Current Treatment Opinions in Gastroenterology*, an estimated [35](#)





Castor oil is a natural laxative.

Castor oil is a stimulant laxative. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, stimulant laxatives cause the bowel to move, squeeze, and contract harder than they usually would.

This means that when a person drinks the oil, it stimulates the bowel to move more. This increased motion encourages the stool to [pass through](#) the intestine and out of the rectum.

Using stimulant laxatives for extended periods may eventually cause the bowel muscles to stop working properly. For this reason, use castor oil as constipation relief sparingly. Instead, try using other natural aids to soften the stool, such as olive oil.

Although castor oil can relieve constipation, it can also cause nausea and vomiting as a side effect. Anyone taking castor oil for constipation should be cautious, as it is possible they will become nauseous.

Dosage

People describe the very distinct taste of castor oil as similar to petroleum jelly.

The oil is very thick, making it hard to swallow. Some manufacturers add castor oil to other preparations to make it easier to drink.

Anyone planning to take castor oil preparations for constipation should always read the label to make sure they are taking the proper dose. A typical dose might be around 15 milliliters (ml), which is equal to about half an ounce or 3 teaspoons.

= 1 Tablespoon

Some people mix castor oil with another liquid or flavored drink to counteract the strong odor and flavor, including:

- fruit juice
- milk
- soft drink
- water

How long does it take castor oil to work?

Castor oil typically causes a bowel movement to occur in 2 to 3 hours. However, it may take up to 6 hours to work for some people.

Due to the delayed effects of castor oil, avoid taking it before bedtime.



People with other symptoms, such as stomach pain and nausea, should avoid castor oil and seek treatment instead.

Castor oil is not appropriate for certain groups of people, as it might pose a health risk in some circumstances.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) classify castor oil as a type of medication that [might harm a fetus](#) or cause congenital abnormalities if a woman takes castor oil during pregnancy.

For pregnant women, the risks of taking castor oil far outweigh the benefits of taking it.

People with the following symptoms should also avoid castor oil:

- rectal bleeding
- strong, sudden stomach pain
- symptoms of [appendicitis](#)
- symptoms of a blocked intestine, such as an inability to pass gas and vomiting
- vomiting

People should only use strong laxatives, such as castor oil, as a short-term solution for constipation. Taking castor oil to assist every bowel movement can have serious complications.

In severe cases, the bowels can stop functioning, which can lead to long-term constipation.

Other side effects of long-term use can include:

- [dehydration](#)
- [diarrhea](#)
- too little [potassium](#) in the body
- loss of essential nutrients due to rapid stool movement
- muscle weakness
- swelling of the bowel

People who experience these side effects should stop taking castor oil immediately and seek treatment.

Cautions for children and infants

Children younger than 6 years of age should not take castor oil.

Always talk to a pediatrician before giving castor oil to children between the ages of 6 and 10 years to make sure it is safe.

While castor oil may help reduce constipation, there are often safer and gentler methods, especially for children. Examples include adding more fiber into the diet or taking a stool softener.

Children might also have [anxiety](#) around having a bowel movement or going to the bathroom in public places while they are developing. If constipation has psychological causes, treating the underlying condition becomes as important as treating the constipation symptoms.

When to see a doctor



Visit a doctor if other symptoms occur alongside constipation.

A person who has been experiencing constipation for over a week should seek medical attention. A doctor can work to identify the possible underlying causes of constipation and recommend the best way to treat it.

Constipation can be part of a group of symptoms that signal a medical emergency, such as a blocked intestine. When this happens, stool stops moving and travels back up the intestine, which may cause a tear in the intestines.

A blocked intestine also causes very uncomfortable symptoms, such as bloating and stomach pain. Symptoms that require emergency attention from a doctor include:

- bleeding from the mouth or rectum
- confusion
- nausea that does not resolve
- sudden, unexplained muscle weakness

While constipation is common, it should not be constant. Bowel activity usually returns to normal after adjusting the diet or taking medicine.

Preventing constipation

There are many lifestyle changes that a person can make to help prevent constipation. To encourage a regular, smooth bowel function, try:

- **Increasing the intake of dietary fiber:** A person should consume between [25 and 31 grams of fiber](#) per day, according to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. Dietary fiber sources include beans, whole-grain cereals and bread, fruits, and vegetables.
- **Drinking plenty of water:** Water bulks out stools, making them easier to pass and stimulating a bowel movement.
- **Exercising regularly:** Taking a 30-minute walk each day or just getting up and moving around can promote movement in the bowels, reducing constipation.
- **Never ignore the urge to pass a stool:** People should allow themselves enough time to have a bowel movement without straining.

Other treatments

Castor oil is one of many laxative medicines for constipation. Examples of other medications include:

- bulk-forming agents, such as FiberCon or Metamucil

- lubricants that make stool easier to pass, such as Fleet enemas
- osmotic agents, such as Milk of Magnesia or [Miralax](#)
- stool softeners, such as Colace

If constipation is severe and leads to a blocked intestine, surgery may be necessary.

Doctors will try many different methods, including castor oil, to prevent the condition from becoming more serious.