

MEDICATIONS FOR TREATING CONSTIPATION

TYPE AND ACTION	GENERIC	BRAND EXAMPLES	MOST COMMON SIDE EFFECTS
Bulking Agents: Absorb liquids in the intestines and swell to form a soft, bulky stool. Also known as fiber supplements, these agents must be taken with water.	psyllium methylcellulose	Metamucil®	Bloating; diarrhea; rumbling sounds; nausea; mild abdominal cramps
	polycarbophil	Citrucel®, Fibercon®	
Osmotic Laxatives: Draw water into the bowel from surrounding body tissues, providing a soft stool mass.	magnesium hydroxide	Milk of Magnesia®	Dehydration; reduced electrolytes; bloating; cramping
	polyethylene glycol (PEG)	MiraLax®	
	lactulose (prescription)	Chronulac®, Cephulac®	
	sorbitol	Xylitol®	
Stimulant Laxatives: Encourage bowel movements by acting on the intestinal wall, causing rhythmic muscle contractions.	sennosides/senna	Ex-Lax®, Senokot®	Abdominal discomfort; faintness; cramps
	bisacodyl	Correctol®, Dulcolax®	
	castor oil		
Stool Softeners: Help liquids mix into the stool and prevent dry, hard stool masses. Stool softeners are not laxatives, but can be used to help relieve excess straining or painful defecation due to a rectal tear.	docusate sodium docusate calcium	Colace®	Bitter taste or throat irritation; skin rash; diarrhea; mild nausea
Emollients: Coat the bowel and the stool mass with a waterproof film so stool remains soft.	mineral oil		Nausea; cramps

MEDICATIONS FDA APPROVED FOR TREATING CHRONIC CONSTIPATION

Chloride Channel Activator: Activates specific chloride channels in the lining of the small intestines, thereby increasing intestinal fluids and softening stools.	lubiprostone (prescription)	Amitiza®	Nausea; diarrhea
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