**CONSTIPATION PROTOCOL**

It is natural and optimal to have **1-3** well formed, non-foul, smooth, food-particle-free bowel movements per day, ideally at the same time, and with little effort or time to eliminate. If not, downstream health issues are likely to happen as toxins recirculate throughout the body when they are not eliminated. As part of a foundational health protocol, regulated and adequate excretion, nutrition, and sleep are essential to optimizing health, vitality and longevity. A stagnated colon can allow for toxins to be reabsorbed back into your body. Constipation can signal deeper issues like dehydration, too much stress, food sensitivities, inflammation and an imbalance in intestinal bacteria. Constipation can both contribute to and be a result of toxic overload as well, stressing the liver, gallbladder, kidneys, etc. -- adding to an toxic burden compromising overall health and exacerbating ongoing symptoms.

**Here are some things to implement for issues with constipation:**

**1. Drink This Upon Waking**

One of the best ways to flush your system and get your internal digestive tract moving is to wake up with a warm or hot cup of water with fresh squeezed lemon juice. Not only is this a really healthy way to cleanse your liver and give you an electrolyte energy boost, but it can signal your gut to wake up. It’s also very important to remember that many people are constipated because they are dehydrated. When this occurs, your body can reabsorb water from your colon leaving you constipated or with overly solid bowel movements. And, since you probably haven’t had any water in about 10-12 hours from dinnertime the night before, it’s best to begin to hydrate your body right when you wake up. Start your day off right with warm water and lemon and then aim to drink about 1/2 your body weight in water throughout the day.

**2. Get Into a Bathroom Schedule**

Another helpful tip is to try to get your body in a natural rhythm when it comes to when you’re having a bowel movement each day. Ideally, you’ll wake up every morning, have your warm/hot water with lemon and then shortly after use the bathroom. However, some people need to shower first, drink some black coffee/tea, or have their morning smoothie. The bottom-line is to pick a time each morning and at least attempt to try and have a bowel movement. Don’t strain, but do try to set a time to get your body into a routine of going to the bathroom each day at the same time. It may take a week or two, but hopefully by using the strategies outlined here you’ll get your bathroom schedule in a natural rhythm where you’ll be able to eliminate each morning around the same time.

**3. Drink Morning Smoothies**

You can blend your favorite all-in-one powder (multi vitamin/mineral, electrolyte, protein, and antioxidants), berries, some greens, and any other health item you’re enjoying that week. By mixing all these powerful nutrients with 16-20oz of water (or half nut milk) you are super-hydrating your body and packing it full of nutrients and easier to digest fibers.

**4. Exercise**

You may not have heard this before, but exercise can be a powerful way to regulate your bowels and get that peristaltic wave moving (this is the natural movement of stool through your intestines). Exercise provides a temporary strain on the body, followed by a relaxation effect. The same effect that benefits high blood pressure also helps with improving normal bowel movements. If you’re not someone that exercises now, walk daily and include every other day workouts to start. Start slow, but definitely get your body moving

**5. Learn to Breathe**

Keep in mind that one of the main reasons people are “locked up” in their intestines is because they are overly stressed causing tension over the entire body - including our gut. The best way to remedy this is to learn relaxation breathing. The good news is that it’s as simple as catching yourself holding your breath or chest breathing when stressed, and then switching your tense breathing over to more relaxed belly breathing. Simply breathe through your nose for 5 seconds allowing your belly to rise and then out through your mouth or nose for 7 seconds (longer out breath, than breath in). Using this technique and taking just 5 of these breaths when stressed may just turn your whole day around!

**6. Eat Vegetables**

Vegetables contain the fiber your digestive tract is looking for to add bulk to your stool and aid in moving waste out of your body. The goal is to get 1-2c of veggies at each meal. This could be as easy as adding a cup of greens (spinach, chard, kale, etc.) to your blended berry AM smoothie then a salad or cooked veggies with lunch, and the same with dinner.

Additional Foods Treatments for Constipation:

* avoid hydrogenated and processed foods
* eliminate dairy
* add ground flax seeds and chia seeds to diet
* add flaxseed oil (unheated) in salad dressings
* eat more garlic
* soak dried figs or prunes overnight; drink the water
* papaya fruit stimulates bowel activity
* psyllium powder (start with ½ - 1 t per day and go up to 2-3 T/day -- powder form is good for baking or mixing in a smoothie)

**7. Sleep Schedule**

It’s all about creating natural rhythms in the body… And, staying with a sleep schedule is no different. Imagine trying to wake up each morning and create your bathroom routine, but every morning you’re varying that time by 2 hours due to different waking times. Your body will never know if it’s supposed to be having a bowel movement at 6am, 8am, or 10am… My suggestion is to create as many rhythms as possible. For at least the first 21 days try to go to bed and wake each day within 30-minutes of the same set time. This will then allow you to have your lemon water, smoothie, and then train your body when to have a morning bowel movement.

**8. Food Sensitivities**

Sometimes constipation goes deeper than dehydration or not getting in enough good fiber… You may actually be eating foods that are creating inflammation and disturbing your gut bacteria. If after trying the lemon water, AM Smoothie, daily water, and adding vegetables to your meals, you’re still not having 1-2 bowel movements every day, I would look into food sensitivities. It may also be a good idea to run a lab if you suffer from bloating.

**9. Supplement Treatment for Constipation**

Without going into a hair tissue mineral analysis lab test or Organic Acids Test to look at your gut function, simply adding some key quality supplements can help. The top recommendation is to add a probiotic and magnesium citrate power before bed (and in the morning for severe constipation) can make a world of difference. Magnesium citrate (at least 300 mg) helps start back up that peristaltic wave by relaxing the tension in your body, and the probiotics I recommend can help rebalance your gut bacteria.

Supplements to relieve constipation:

* magnesium citrate minimum 300mg
* vitamin C (to bowel tolerance)
* digestive enzymes
* aloe vera juice (2-4oz)
* slippery elm
* marshmallow root
* psyllium powder (start with ½ - 1 t per day and go up to 2-3 T/day -- powder form is good for baking or mixing in a smoothie; or capsule form, 3-5 caps nightly at dinner)
* high quality probiotics

**10. Seasonal Detox & Bowel Cleanses**

Up until just about 100 years ago most cultures around the world had practiced the 5,000 year old tradition of parasite, yeast, bacteria, and colon cleaning for better health & longevity. They understood that health is first created in the digestive tract (70-80% of your immune system lines your intestines) and due to this fact they did seasonal cleanses, and whenever they were feeling ill. A candida/bacterial overgrowth protocol or a colon cleanse to initially remove built up waste that can be stuck in the pockets of your small and large intestine can make a big difference. If health begins in the gut, it simply makes sense from a nutrient absorption, and immune function standpoint to get your digestive system working properly first.

**11. Rebalance your Microbiome**

Dysbiosis, or an imbalance in gut flora in our microbiome can lead to IBS, digestive issues, and constipation. Removing hidden toxins, gut infections, OTCs and pharmaceuticals, inflammatory foods, allergenic foods, reducing stress and working to heal and seal the gut lining and replenish a healthy microbial balance with a trained integrative health practitioner can restore your microbial balance and promote proper elimination.

**Other techniques to Research**

* Bowel massage
* Vagal nerve stimulation (deep breathing, EFT, singing loudly, humming, relaxation techniques, GABA and/or 5HTP/tryptophan supplementation)

**Functional Medicine Lab Testing for Constipation:**

* IgG food sensitivity testing
* Comprehensive Stool Analysis (CSA) for Candida and Parasites
* Organic Acids Test (OATS)
* Heavy metals/minerals test
* Mycotoxins/Mold test

**Putting It All Together**

The initial recommendation is to pick out the 2-3 tips from above that you know you can start on right away. Be consistent with those and see how they work for you. Just using 2-3 changes (like the lemon water and AM smoothie) may be enough to do the trick, or maybe it just gets you moving in the right direction. Either way, it’s great start and certainly better than doing nothing. Each week you can always try to add 1-2 more tips from my Top 10 list until you become regular again.