



衛生防護中心  
Centre for Health Protection

### Healthy Tips

Constipation usually is temporary and not serious. Yet, it may be extremely annoying or uncomfortable when feeling bloated.

In most cases, constipation can be prevented through having a well-balanced diet with enough fibre, drinking more fluids, exercising regularly and allowing enough time to have a bowel movement.

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衛生署  
Department of Health

# Non-Communicable Diseases Aware

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## Are You Aware That ....

- Ageing population, increasing affluence and unhealthy dietary habits are the most likely contributing factors for colorectal cancer in many developed countries or regions, including Hong Kong.<sup>1</sup>
- Since the early 1980s, there has been a steady increase in incidence of colorectal cancer in Hong Kong.<sup>1</sup> Colorectal cancer is now the second most common cancer affecting both men and women, following lung cancer in men and breast cancer in women. In 2002, there were 1 965 new cases of colorectal cancer diagnosed in men and 1 554 new cases in females, accounting for 16.4% and 15.7% of all new cancers in males and females respectively.<sup>2</sup> In terms of death, colorectal cancer killed 1 537 people, giving a crude death rate of 22.6 per 100 000 population in 2003.<sup>3</sup>
- In 2003, Hospital Authority (HA) recorded over 10 000 in-patient discharges and deaths attributed to colorectal cancer, giving an overall in-patient discharges and deaths rate of 148.0 per 100 000 population and accounting for about 13.3% of all cancer related in-patient discharges and deaths in that year.<sup>4</sup>
- As shown in Table 1, the morbidity and mortality of colorectal cancer increased with age. Analyzed by sex, males had higher rates than their female counterparts in incidence, in-patient discharges and deaths and mortality in almost all age groups.<sup>2-4</sup>
- Although colorectal cancer is associated with advancing age, it can well be prevented by regular physical activity, maintaining an optimal weight, and diet modification with increased consumption of fruit and vegetables and decreased consumption of red and processed meat.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1: Burden of illness due to colorectal cancer

Age group	No. (rate*) of new cases, 2002			No. (rate*) of in-patient discharges and deaths in HA hospitals, 2003			No. (rate*) of deaths, 2003 <sup>#</sup>		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
24 and below	2 (0.2)	2 (0.2)	4 (0.2)	22 (2.2)	16 (1.7)	38 (2.0)	3 (0.3)	0 (0.0)	3 (0.2)
25-44	89 (7.9)	94 (7.0)	183 (7.4)	350 (31.8)	369 (27.8)	719 (29.6)	32 (2.9)	31 (2.3)	63 (2.6)
45-64	566 (71.1)	385 (50.6)	951 (61.1)	2 123 (256.7)	1 483 (184.7)	3 606 (221.3)	217 (26.2)	107 (13.3)	324 (19.9)
65 and above	1 308 (364.3)	1 073 (256.7)	2 381 (306.4)	3 268 (887.1)	2 439 (571.1)	5 707 (717.4)	636 (172.6)	511 (119.6)	1 147 (144.2)
Total	1 965 (59.5)	1 554 (44.6)	3 519 (51.8)	5 763 (175.0)	4 307 (122.7)	10 070 (148.0)	888 (27.0)	649 (18.5)	1 537 (22.6)

Notes: \* Rate per 100 000 population in the respective age and sex subgroups. <sup>#</sup> Provisional figures.

Sources: Hospital Authority, Department of Health, Census and Statistics Department

### References

1. Report of Cancer Expert Working Group on Cancer Prevention and Screening, December 2004. Department of Health. URL:<http://www.chp.gov.hk>.
2. Hong Kong Cancer Registry, Hospital Authority. URL:<http://www3.ha.org.hk/cancereg/>.
3. Mortality statistics, 2003 (provisional data). Department of Health, Census and Statistics Department.
4. In-patient statistics, 2003. Hospital Authority.



## Annoying Constipation

Constipation refers to passage of small amounts of hard, dry faeces, usually fewer than three times a week.<sup>1</sup> At one time or another, almost everyone gets constipated. In most cases, constipation is temporary and not serious. Yet, it may be extremely annoying or uncomfortable when feeling bloated.

Constipation is often a symptom of something wrong with the daily life, including unhealthy diet and lack of exercise. Use of certain medications can cause constipation too, such as morphine group of pain-killers, diuretics, tranquillizers, iron supplements, and antacids that contain aluminium or calcium etc. Constipation can also be secondary to some underlying medical ailments affecting intestinal function (e.g. bowel obstruction, diverticulosis or spastic colon), neurogenic disorders (e.g. stroke, spinal cord injuries or Parkinson’s disease), metabolic and endocrine conditions (e.g. diabetes and hypothyroidism), or psychological distress including emotional stress or depression. Constipation is common in pregnancy due to reduced mobility or hormonal changes. Be aware, chronic constipation can lead to complications, such as haemorrhoids or rectal prolapse caused by straining, and fecal impaction when the hard stool packs the intestine and rectum so tightly that the normal bowel mobility is just not enough to expel the hard faeces. It may also signal and be the only noticeable symptom of a serious underlying disorder such as colorectal cancer. Thus, it would be wise to check with a doctor if there is any notable change in bowel habits.

In Hong Kong, constipation is one of the most common gastrointestinal complaints after stomach ache and abdominal pain. According to the Population Health Survey, which face-to-face interviewed over 7 000 non-institutionalized men and women aged 15 and above between September 2003 and May 2004, about one in nine (10.8%) people reported having experienced constipation in the month before interview. Those reporting constipation more often were women and people aged 65 and over (Table 1).

Table 1: Number and Rate of people aged 15 and above reported that they had constipation in one month before enumeration, by sex and age group

Age group	Male		Female		Total	
	Number ('000)	Rate*	Number ('000)	Rate*	Number ('000)	Rate*
15-24	17.4	3.9	62.0	13.6	79.4	8.8
25-34	15.1	3.8	74.5	14.3	89.6	9.7
35-44	39.5	7.3	89.0	11.7	128.5	9.9
45-54	31.8	6.5	78.3	12.1	110.1	9.7
55-64	26.9	8.6	45.9	14.3	72.8	11.5
65 and above	65.1	17.0	70.3	17.3	135.4	17.2
Total	195.8	7.6	420.0	13.5	615.8	10.8

Note: \* Rate per 100 persons in the respective sex and age groups.  
Source: Population Health Survey 2003/04 (provisional data). Department of Health.

A common misconception concerning proper bowel habit is the need to have a bowel movement every day. Such myth has led to the improper use of laxatives or other “detox” products by some people. In fact, there is no right number of bowel movements. The frequency of bowel movements among healthy people varies greatly from three movements a day to three times a week, depending on many things including the food that the individuals eat, level of activities or usual bowel habits. In most cases, constipation can be prevented through the following lifestyle changes:<sup>1</sup>

**Have a well-balanced diet with enough fibre** – A diet with enough fibre (20-35 grams per day) helps form bulky stool and results in more frequent bowel movements that prevent constipation. Good sources of fibre include whole grains, fresh fruit and vegetables. The World Health Organization recommends daily consumption of at least 5 servings of fruit and vegetables (see the January 2005 issue of NCD Aware for some practical tips to include more fruit and vegetables in the diet). Limiting foods that have little or no fibre, such as meat, refined or processed foods, is also important in preventing constipation;

**Drink more fluids** – Fluids like water, juice or soup help keep the stool soft and easy to pass. Try not to drink liquids containing caffeine (such as coffee or cola) or alcohol as they tend to dry out the digestive system;

**Exercise regularly** - Engaging in daily exercise can release stress and improve bowel mobility. Even a 30-minute walk daily will help promote normal bowel function;

**Allow enough time to have a bowel movement** – Pay attention to the bodily needs. Do not ignore the urge and allow enough time to have a bowel movement.

It is noteworthy that people who are mildly constipated do not need laxatives. Be aware, improper or prolonged use of laxatives can damage nerve cells in the colon and interfere with the natural ability of the bowels to contract. Those who have made diet and lifestyle changes and are still constipated should consult a doctor before the use of any forms of laxatives, especially when there are other symptoms like blood in stool or abdominal distension.

Reference

1. What I need to know about constipation. National Institution of Health, 2003.

\* \* \* \* \* News Bites \* \* \* \* \*

A study, which followed up over 478 000 men and women aged 25-70 years from 10 European countries, reported that colorectal cancer risk was positively associated with eating red and processed meat. The risk was 35% higher among people who ate red or processed meat more than 160 g/day compared with those eating less than 20 g/day (95% CI=0.96-1.88, P<sub>trend</sub>=0.03). Besides, the study found that the risk of development of colorectal cancer was inversely associated with intake of fish. Consuming more than 80 g/day of fish was associated with a 31% reduction in risk compared with those eating fish less than 10 g/day (95%CI = 0.54-0.88, P<sub>trend</sub><0.001). (Source: Norat T et al. Meat, fish and colorectal cancer risk: the European prospective investigation into cancer and nutrition. Journal of the National Cancer Institute 2005; 97(12): 906-16).

\* \* \* \* \* Event Calendar \* \* \* \* \*

Inadequate intake of fruits and vegetables is one of the leading risk factors for common health threats like heart diseases, stroke, diabetes mellitus and some cancers. Thus, the “2+3 A Day” campaign is being launched by the Central Health Education Unit (CHEU) to promote a minimum daily intake of 2 servings of fruits and 3 servings of vegetables for adults. Health messages will be disseminated via different channels including printed materials, poster campaigns, the media, 24-hour health education hotline and the internet. For more information, please visit the “2+3 Healthy Diet” website at <http://2plus3.cheu.gov.hk>