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Constipation in Parkinson's Disease

Jennifer Dimino, MD
Clinical Assistant Professor
Neurogastroenterology and Motility

Objectives

- Understand why constipation happens
- Learn what you can do
- Know when to ask for help

Why are we talking about this?

- Constipation is the most common gastrointestinal or gut symptom in Parkinson's disease
- Affects up to 80-90% of people with Parkinson's at some point
- Affects quality of life
- Many treatment options

What Is Constipation?

- Fewer than 3 bowel movements per week
- Hard, dry, or lumpy stools
- Straining or feeling like you can't fully empty
- Feeling bloated or uncomfortable


ChatGPT

Why Does Parkinson's Cause Constipation?

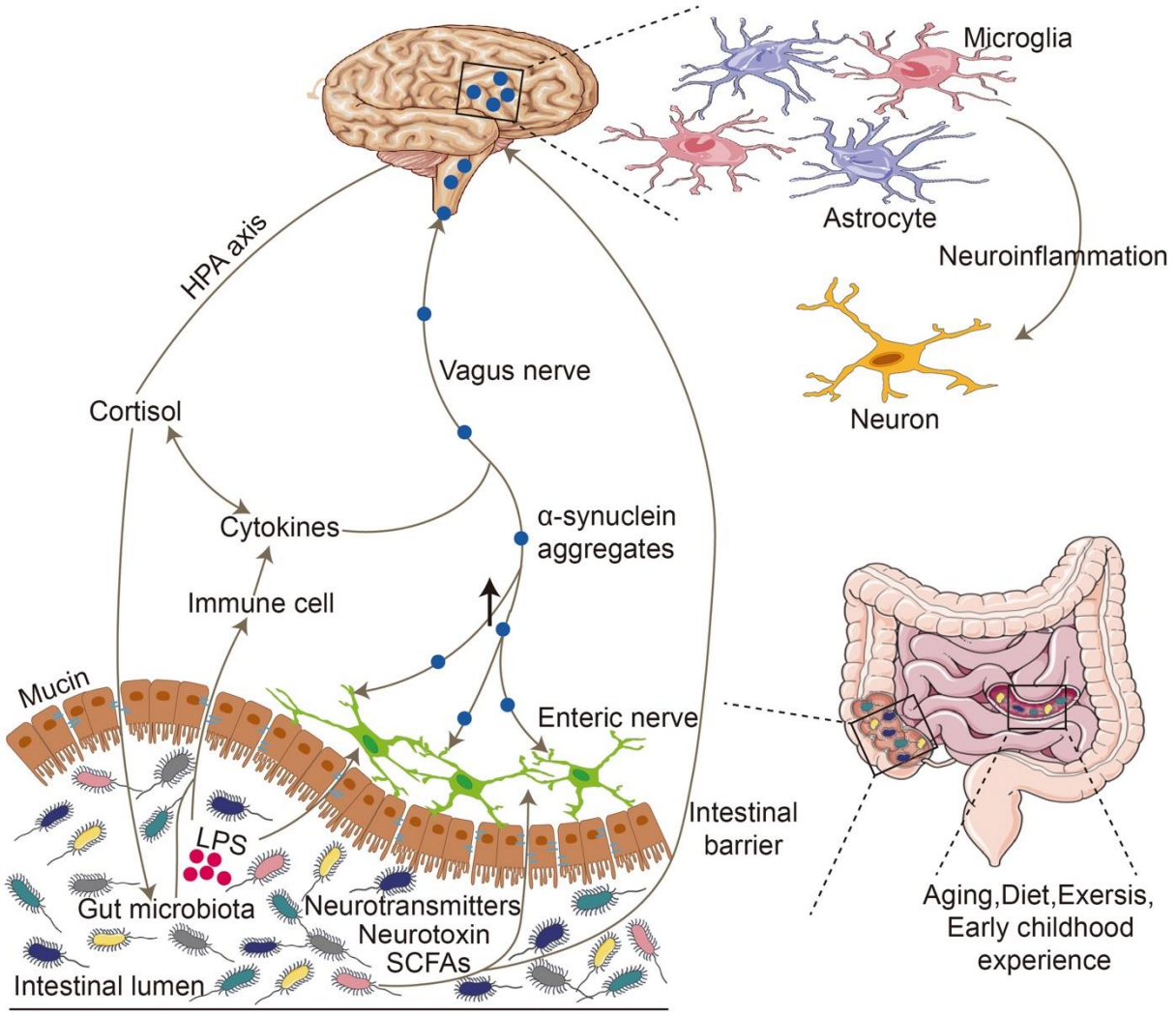
Constipation is one of the earliest symptoms of Parkinson's and can start years before tremor or stiffness

The gut has its own nervous system - sometimes called the "second brain"

In Parkinson's, the same protein changes (alpha-synuclein) that affect movement also affect the nerves in the gut, and may originate in the gut

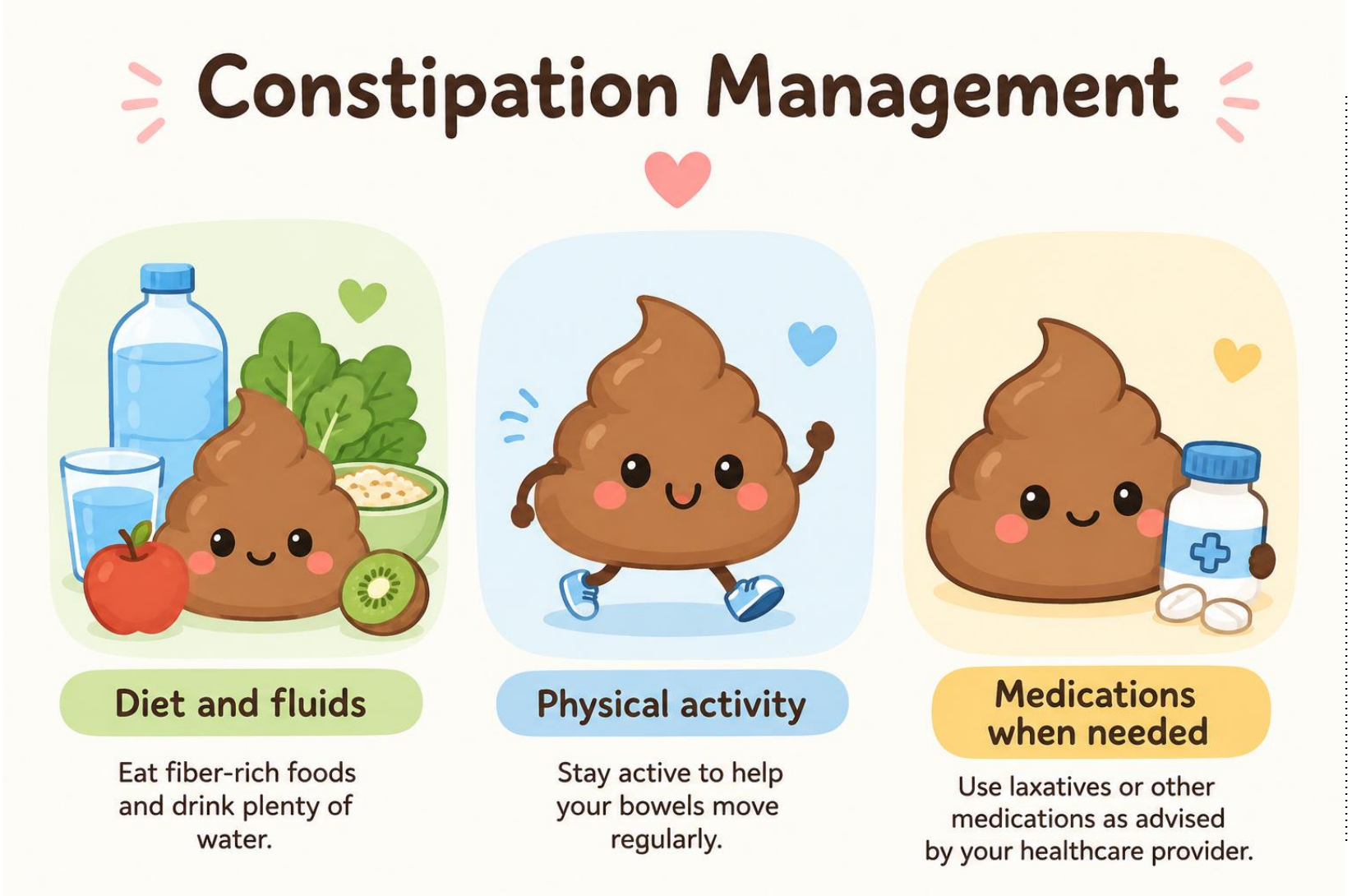
This slows down the muscles that move food through your intestines

The pelvic floor muscles that help with bowel movements can also be affected



Fan et al. CNS Neurosci Ther. 2022

How To Manage Constipation?



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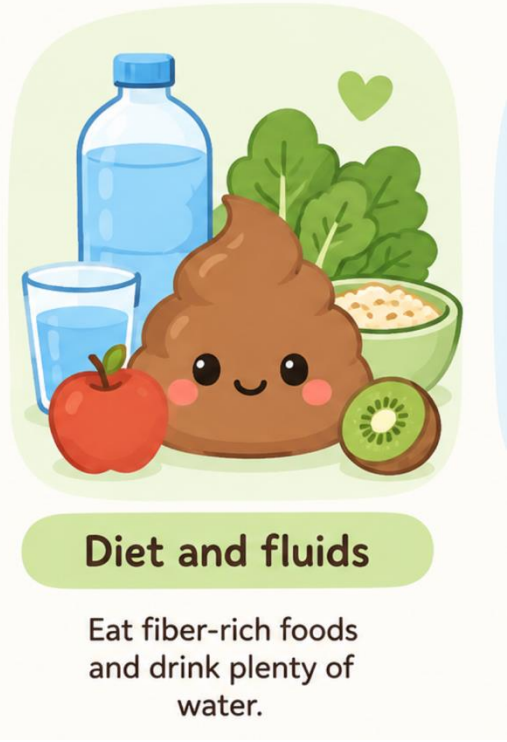
Diet and Fluids

Fluids:

- Aim for 6–8 glasses of water per day
- Spread throughout the day, not all at once

Fiber:

- Eat high-fiber foods: vegetables, fruits (especially kiwi or prunes), whole grains, oatmeal/bran
- Try to include high-fiber foods at least 2 meals per day
- Increase fiber gradually to avoid gas and bloating
- Limit low-fiber foods like white bread, pastries, and processed snacks



Coffee or probiotics may help with constipation in Parkinson's disease, but the evidence is limited.

Physical Activity

- Physical activity helps the gut muscles work better
- Walking, swimming, and tai chi are excellent choices
- Exercise as vigorously as your body allows – even gentle movement helps
- Try to be active every day

Bonus: Exercise also helps your Parkinson's motor symptoms!

Medications That Can Help

Over the counter options:

- Fiber supplements (psyllium/Metamucil, Benefiber, Citrucel, as powder, capsule, gummy)
- Polyethylene glycol (MiraLAX) – gentle laxative, good at softening
- Colace (docusate) – may not be superior to placebo
- Senna (sennosides) – stimulant laxative
- Magnesium oxide or citrate – caution with kidney disease

If still not enough

Over the counter:

- Dulcolax/bisacodyl or Glycerin suppository
- Enemas (water, mineral oil, etc.)

Important: Stronger laxatives, suppositories, and enemas should be reserved for when gentler options haven't worked. Talk to your doctor before using them regularly.

Prescription:

- Lubiprostone (Amitiza) – a prescription medication shown to help chronic constipation, including in Parkinson's
- Prucalopride (Motegrity) – a prescription that helps the gut muscles contract; shown to be safe and effective in Parkinson's patients

Helpful Habits

- Try to have a bowel movement at the same time each day – in the morning or after meals is best (the gut is naturally more active then)
- Don't ignore the urge – go when you feel it
- Give yourself enough time and privacy in the bathroom
- A small footstool under the feet can help position your body for easier bowel movements
- Keep a simple log of your bowel movements to share with your doctor

Why Treating Constipation Matters

- Untreated constipation can cause discomfort, bloating, nausea, and loss of appetite
- Severe constipation can interfere with how well Parkinson's medications are absorbed
- In rare cases, severe untreated constipation can lead to serious complications (bowel blockage)
- Treating constipation improves quality of life and may help other Parkinson's treatments work better

When to Call Your Doctor

Reach out to your provider if you experience:

- No bowel movement for 3 or more days despite trying home remedies
- Severe abdominal pain or bloating
- Blood in your stool
- Nausea or vomiting with constipation
- New or sudden worsening of constipation
- Don't wait – early treatment is easier and more effective

Key Takeaways

- Parkinson’s symptoms may actually begin in the gut – the gut symptoms are part of the disease, not just a side effect
- Constipation is extremely common in Parkinson’s (80-90%)
- Diet (fiber + fluids), exercise, and medications can all help
- Talk openly with your doctor – effective treatments are available
- Don't suffer in silence!

References

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Michael J. Fox Foundation: www.michaeljfox.org
UpToDate: www.uptodate.com
https://med.stanford.edu/parkinsons/symptoms-PD/constipation.html

https://squattypotty.com
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