

## Health Trends



### Reduce the Risk of Constipation



**Constipation** can affect anyone at any age and has many different causes (2). Constipation is the most common gastrointestinal (GI) complaint heard by primary care providers (PCP) and family practitioners (3) (6).

A stressful lifestyle, with low physical activity, depression, anxiety, certain medications and a lower economic and social status have all been linked to increasing levels of chronic constipation (3).

**Constipation** is a condition in which an individual has difficulty starting or completing a bowel movement (defecation). Constipation is typically described as having fewer than three bowel movements a week (2), but may include any or all of the following:

- Straining during defecation.
- Lumpy, hard or marble-like stools.
- Painful defecation.
- Two or less bowel movements per week.
- The sensation of incomplete defecation of stool.
- The sensation of anal blockage, and/or difficulty passing stool which persists for several weeks or longer (6).

Constipation can significantly affect an individual's quality of life and, if left untreated, can lead to numerous other health problems, including death (5).

**Constipation** can be broken down into the subgroups of functional, organic, and/or chronic constipation which is a combination of both functional and organic (6).

Individuals can be diagnosed with functional constipation when there is no physical, structural, genetic or medical diagnosis causing the constipation; meaning there is no specific identified cause (2).

Organic constipation means there is an identifiable condition, disorder or diagnosis causing constipation in an individual (4).

Please direct questions or concerns regarding the "Health Trends" newsletter to the Office of Integrated Health Supports Network (OIHSN) at [communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov](mailto:communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov)

To learn more about Constipation you can find the Office of Integrated Health Supports Network Health & Safety Alerts on our website at <https://dbhds.virginia.gov/office-of-integrated-health/>

### Chronic Constipation in Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

Individuals with IDD experience twice as much constipation as the general population and are at extremely high risk of complications such as fecal impactions and bowel obstructions due to chronic constipation (1).

Chronic constipation is considered one of the most fatal conditions for individuals with IDD and leads to many preventable hospital admissions, and avoidable deaths (1).

Many individuals with IDD experience physical and sensory delays, and ongoing emotional distress which affects the GI tract and results in some form of constipation.

An individual might not understand the body's physical sensations which signals the need to defecate, and/or holds back the need to defecate due to anxiety (2).

**It is considered rare for an individual with IDD not to have some form of constipation (1).**

### Signs and Symptoms of Constipation

Each individual experiences symptoms of constipation differently however the most common signs and symptoms include:

- Abnormal cramps and bloating.
- Heart burn.
- Inability to pass flatus (gas).
- A loss of appetite.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Unexplained weight loss.
- Rectal bleeding (2).

### Treatments for Chronic Constipation

If chronic constipation is suspected in an individual with IDD they should be evaluated by their primary care provider (PCP) right away to avoid preventable complications.

The PCP may recommend the layering of treatments to include:

- Addressing the underlying cause.
- Implementing lifestyle changes.
- Administering medications such as over-the-counter stool softeners, or laxatives, etc. (3).

#### Reference

1. Bishop, R., Langhorne, R., Burrows, L. CHAMPS team, Ward, S., Eustice, S., Branford, D., Wilcock, M., Lamb, K., Tavaré, A., Annesley, C., Lewis, S., Voulgaropoulos, V., Sleeman, F., Sargent, B. & Shankar, R. (2024, April). Laxative use in adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities: Developmental of prescribing guidelines. *BJPsych Open*, 10(e84), 1-6. Doi: 10.1192/bio.2024.50
2. Diaz, S., Bittar, K., Hashmi, M.F., & Mendez, M.D. (2023, November). Constipation. *StatPearls Publishing [Internet]*
3. Hayat, U., Dugum, M., & Garg, S. (2017, May). Chronic constipation: Update on management. *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine*, 84(5), 397-408.
4. Pruthi, S. (2023, October). Constipation overview. *Mayo Clinic [Internet]*
5. Robertson, J., Baines, S., Emerson, E. & Hatton, C. (2017, November). Constipation management in people with intellectual disability: A systematic review. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 31(5), 709-724.
6. Włodarczyk, J., Wasniewska, A., Fichna, J., Adam Dzik, A., Dzik, L. & Włodarczyk, M. (2021, April). Current overview on clinical management of chronic constipation. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 10, 1738, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm10081738>

## Health Trends



### ABA SNIPPETS ...

#### Back To School: Behavioral Terms 101

It is back to school month and teachers everywhere are preparing lessons to review those previously taught skills that were not practiced in the summer. I thought we could do a little review of our own and brush up on some behavior analytic terms. Below are some terms that have a different meaning in behavior analysis, than their common, everyday use.

**Stimulus:** This may get people excited, thinking a hefty check is coming their way, but we are not talking about a stimulus check from the government. In ABA stimulus is “an energy change that affects an organism through its receptor cells.” (2)

**Consequence:** The common use of this word is often referring to a punishment after someone does something they shouldn't have. You've probably heard someone say, “there needs to be consequences when they act like that.” While punishment is a type of consequence, in behavior analysis, any stimulus change that follows a behavior is referred to as a consequence (2). This includes reinforcement (increases behavior) and punishment (decreases behavior).

**Positive and Negative:** We might often think of positive as good and negative as bad. In behavior analysis, it's more like math. Positive is the addition (+) of something and negative is the subtraction (-) or removal of something. For example:

- Positive **reinforcement** = adding (+) something that **increases** future behavior
- Negative **reinforcement** = removing (-) something that **increases** future behavior
- Positive **punishment** = adding (+) something that **decreases** future behavior
- Negative **punishment** = removing (-) something that **decreases** future behavior

**Setting Event:** In behavior science, this does not refer to a location where a situation takes place. Instead, setting events are used to describe things that may affect stimulus-response relationships. Some feel setting events are better described as motivating operations, which are any variable that has two specific effects: value-altering and behavior-altering. (2).

In many instances, these labels already had a different meaning in day-to-day language, which can cause confusion in understanding behavioral treatment. (1). Hopefully, this review puts a few extra supplies in your backpack as Virginia gets ready to start another school year.

You may contact DBHDS about these efforts via the following: [Courtney.Pernick@dbhds.virginia.gov](mailto:Courtney.Pernick@dbhds.virginia.gov)

#### References:

1. Becraft, J. L., Cataldo, M. F., Yu-Lefler, H. F., Schenk, Y. A., Edelstein, M. L., & Kurtz, P. F. (2023). Correspondence between data provided by parents and trained observers about challenging behavior. Behavior Analysis: Research and Practice. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bar0000276>
2. Cooper, J.O., Heron, T.E., & Heward, W.L. (2020). Applied behavior analysis: Third edition. Pearson Education, Inc.

### 2025 Provider Innovation Collaborative



Join us for “**One Work**” at the 2025 Provider Innovation Collaborative (PIC). An event celebrating the collective effort of those who serve and support people with developmental disabilities (DD).

This year's theme honors the idea that no matter our roles, each contribution is part of one powerful mission - **Improving Lives**.

In the diverse and often complex landscape of DD services, it's easy to lose sight of our shared vision. “**One Work**” reminds us of every purposeful act - large or small - drives progress. Together, we've made meaningful strides across Virginia, and this event is a chance to celebrate, reflect, and reignite our commitment.

Our speakers bring a range of experiences and insights that promise to inform, inspire, and challenge us. Discover fresh perspectives and practical strategies which boost motivation, elevate quality, and support sustainable services.

This year's four session topics are - Health and Safety - Business Sense - Risk - And Person-Centered Practice

**Registration Link:** <https://pic2025.rsvpify.com/>

Doubletree Hilton, 1021 Koger Center Blvd Richmond, Virginia 23235

\$100 per person - Ticket price includes: Interactive workshops, trainings by leaders in the field of DD, a reception, breakfast, lunch and snacks throughout the conference.

Tickets sales end 8/13/25. \$150.00 per Vendor table - 20 tables available on first come basis.

Use your smart phone to scan the QR Code to link to the Office of Integrated Health Supports Network website where you will find all our resources for nursing, dental, physical therapy, wound care and the mobile rehab engineering.



To scan the QR code, open your cell phone camera and aim it at the QR code, then tap the link that pops up. Then be sure to bookmark the link.