

Spring 2006 Wellness Article

Enjoy Your Travel Opportunities -- Don't Let a Common Ailment Slow You Down

(ARA) - Whether you are headed to the big city for a business deal or for a visit with your grandchildren, traveling can be one of the most rewarding opportunities in life. However, along with traveling could come bothersome health conditions that may negatively impact your trip. While it is common knowledge that diarrhea is associated with traveling, many people may not be aware that constipation as well is often experienced when traveling long distances.

Constipation can occur during travel because of differences in routine, diet, changes in lifestyle and not drinking enough water. Other factors contributing to constipation are lack of exercise and ignoring the urge to go to the bathroom. It is also important to note that constipation may be the result of something that is not controllable, like problems with intestinal function, the side effects of certain medications, or age (particularly in people over 65).

People who experience constipation may find it difficult and painful to have a bowel movement. This is because stools may be very hard, making it so difficult to pass that straining occurs. Other symptoms include feeling bloated, uncomfortable or sluggish. Sufferers may find they spend hours in the bathroom, only to have an unsatisfactory result. In some people, constipation is chronic and can last 12 weeks or more. In other words, constipation is not something you want to deal with either on vacation or during normal daily living.

"Constipation, particularly if it's chronic, can hinder quality of life because of the unpleasant symptoms associated with it," said Douglas Drossman, M.D., professor of medicine and psychiatry and co-director of the University of North Carolina (UNC) Center for GI Functional and Motility Disorders in Chapel Hill. "As such, it is important for people who are affected to openly discuss this with their doctor, because there are solutions."



Constipation is more common than you may think. It affects 30 million people in the United States and is the cause of 2.5 million visits to physicians and 92,000 hospitalizations annually.

Traditionally, treatments for constipation included increasing fiber intake, drinking enough water and using laxatives or stool softeners. However, these treatments are not always effective, and in some cases, may actually make the problem more severe. This can lead to increased bloating or gas, or carry a risk of dependency on laxatives. Additionally, laxatives, stool softeners and even fiber therapies purchased in pharmacies could be bulky and hard to transport.

Whether you are traveling or just being bothered in daily life, if you experience chronic constipation, you should take the important step to visit a doctor. A doctor will be able to accurately assess the problem and provide treatment recommendations.

(Courtesy of ARA Content)