DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Managing Chronic Idiopathic Constipation

Constipation can be uncomfortable and painful. When there is not an obvious cause of your constipation, it is considered idiopathic. A number of dietary and lifestyle adjustments can help alleviate your constipation, and medication can be helpful as well. Asking the right questions during a conversation with your doctor will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

Colon	The colon is also known as the large intestine. This is where waste material is formed into stool.
Rectum	The rectum is a muscular tube which stool travels through before leaving the body.
Anus	The anus is the muscular opening though which stool exits the body.
Hemorrhoids	A hemorrhoid is a swollen vein in the rectum or anus. It can form as a result of straining. Hemorrhoids can be painful and sometimes bleed. Rarely, a blood clot can form inside a hemorrhoid and, in severe cases, a hemorrhoid may need to be surgically repaired.
Impaction	When stool becomes severely hardened or immobile in the colon or rectum, this is described as impaction.
Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)	IBS is a gastrointestinal (GI) condition that causes stomach upset, diarrhea, and/or constipation. Chronic idiopathic constipation is very similar to a type of IBS described as constipation predominant IBS.
Functional GI disorder	When there is no test that can verify or point to the cause of GI problems, they are described as functional GI disorders. Chronic idiopathic constipation is considered a functional GI disorder.
Laxative	A laxative relieves constipation by bulking up the stool.
Stool softener	A stool softener makes the stool moist so it can pass more easily.
Rome criteria	The Rome criteria is a set of diagnostic criteria that classifies functional GI disorders based on symptoms.

Questions to Ask

These questions can help guide you as you discuss your concerns with your medical team.

About Symptoms

❑ Can straining be harmful to my health?

❑ Why do I sometimes have an urgency to poop?

❑ Should I be worried if I see blood in the toilet or on toilet paper?

About Causes & Risk Factors

❑ Could my constipation be related to sitting for long hours?

❑ Can constipation cause health complications?

About Diagnosis

❑ Am I at risk for colon cancer?

❑ Do I need to have a colonoscopy or an imaging test?

About Treatment

❑ If I take medication for my constipation, will I become dependent on it?

❑ Are over-the-counter stool softeners and laxatives safe for me?

About Living With Chronic Idiopathic Constipation

❑ Would it be beneficial or harmful to take vitamins?

❑ Is there something I should take when I feel nauseated?

❑ Can I drink caffeinated beverages?

❑ Can I drink alcohol?

❑ Are there any types of weight loss diets I need to avoid?