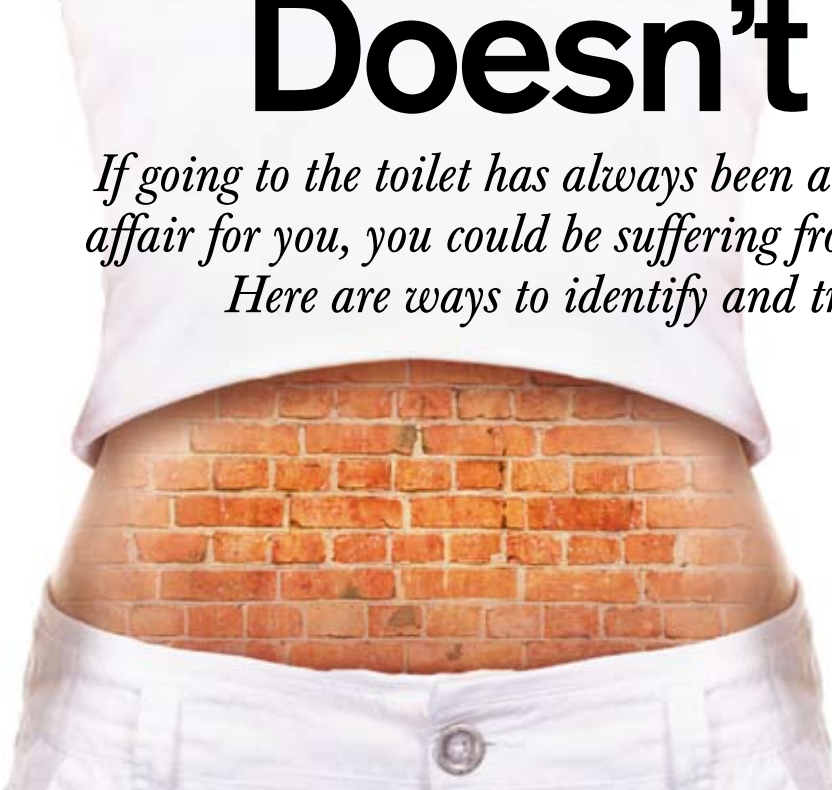


# When Nature Doesn't Call

*If going to the toilet has always been an infrequent or difficult affair for you, you could be suffering from chronic constipation. Here are ways to identify and treat the problem.*



**Chronic constipation affects 25 per cent of the Singapore population, especially women between 20 and 29 years old.**

Enjoying a nice meal, watching a movie or being intimate with a partner comes easy for most, but for a sufferer of chronic constipation, simple daily activities can be stressful and embarrassing because of the increase in flatulence from bloating, and uncertainty in answering the call of nature.

If this sounds uncomfortably familiar, rest assured you're not alone. According to a 2010 study published in the *Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology*, chronic constipation affects 25 per cent of the Singapore population, especially women between 20 and 29 years old. In fact, the prevalence of chronic constipation is even higher than other more talked-about illnesses such as asthma, diabetes and heart diseases.

## **KNOW THE DIFFERENCE - ACUTE OR CHRONIC?**

Constipation occurs in two forms – acute and chronic. The former generally

goes away after a few days or weeks; the latter can persist for anything from a period of three months to a few years.

## **LOOK OUT FOR SYMPTOMS**

If you've been experiencing one or more of these symptoms for three months or longer, alarm bells should be ringing:

- Abdominal pain and bloating
- Straining during bowel movements
- Hard or lumpy stools
- A "plugged up" or incomplete feeling after bowel movements
- A need to press around the anus to release stools
- Fewer than three bowel movements per week

It is important to observe symptoms such as abdominal pain and bloating, not just the frequency of the stools. This provides an earlier detection and more accurate diagnosis of your condition.

## **SEEK TREATMENT**

Occasional constipation can usually be treated with lifestyle changes such as more exercise, fluids and dietary fibre. If symptoms persist, you should consult your doctor who may order tests like colonoscopy and colon transit study to determine the underlying cause and to eliminate more serious problems. Over-the-counter medicines like laxatives can help to soften stools and stimulate the colon. However, for more severe cases, there are newer agents like Prucalopride, a prescription drug which stimulates chemical receptors in the colon to accelerate contractions and restore bowel function. The result is the release of stools, relief of symptoms, and the restoration of ease into your daily activities.

This message is jointly brought to you by the Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) Support Group of Singapore and Janssen. For more information, write to [ibssupport@gmail.com](mailto:ibssupport@gmail.com).