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Whether it's an occasional blockage or a chronic problem, straining to go number two is never any fun. Although constipation is really common—affecting four million people in the U.S., according to the experts at Johns Hopkins—it can still be embarrassing, which is why you might be reluctant to bring it up with your doctor or pharmacist. Yet ignoring constipation is also a mistake.

Constipation can be painful and uncomfortable, revealing itself through bloating, cramping, and the feeling that you need to poop—but when you try nothing comes out. Left untreated, it can lead to other problems like hemorrhoids, anal fissures, and sometimes even an intestinal blockage.

"Constipation happens when intestinal activity has slowed, which causes the stool to harden and makes it difficult to pass," says Taz Bhatia, MD, an integrative health expert and founder of CentreSpring MD. "It can be caused by certain medicines, a lack of exercise, poor diet, absence of fiber, dehydration, and more." Certain medical conditions, like hypothyroidism, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and Parkinson's disease can also make constipation more likely.

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For many people, simply eating more fiber-rich foods—like prunes, beans, and ample fruits and veggies—along with drinking more water is enough to get things going. But sometimes those tweaks just don't cut it. "A balanced diet along with exercise is often helpful, but for patients with constipation that is affecting the quality of their life, drinking water or increasing fiber in their diet is not sufficient to control their symptoms," says Jonathan Rosenberg, MD, a gastroenterologist at Illinois Gastroenterology Group. That's where over-the-counter remedies for constipation come in.

Whether you're having a rare slow-down or need regular help to stay, well, regular, one of these natural, stimulant-free products should do the trick.