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## SENIOR HEALTH

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# Digestive Tract Problems

## HOW TO GET RELIEF

### **CONSTIPATION**

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Poor diet, inadequate liquids, inactivity, antacids, calcium and iron supplements, medications and misuse of laxatives can cause constipation. Eat high-fiber foods, drink at least eight glasses of water each day and get regular exercise to end constipation. Call your doctor if your constipation lasts more than a week.

### **DIARRHEA**

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Causes of diarrhea include: infection, flu, food poisoning, eating large amounts of fruit, medications and lactose intolerance. To avoid dehydration, be sure to drink large amounts of water and caffeine-free liquids until the diarrhea subsides. Call your doctor if diarrhea continues for two or more days, your stools are black or bloody, you have severe abdominal pain or you have chills accompanied by a fever and vomiting or fainting.

### **DIVERTICULITIS**

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This occurs when small sacs form on the wall of the large intestine. There may be pain in the lower left side of your abdomen accompanied by fever. When the sacs become inflamed and infected, bed rest, antibiotics and plenty of liquids are the usual treatment.

### **HEARTBURN**

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This is the burning feeling you may experience after eating. It may last for minutes or hours. It can be caused by smoking or eating foods such as tomato products, chocolate or fried foods. For relief, change your diet, take antacids, sleep with the head of your bed raised 6 inches, lose weight, eat smaller meals and stop smoking.

### **HEMORRHOIDS**

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These occur when the veins in and around the rectum and anus become inflamed and enlarged. They're usually caused by passing hard, compacted stools or straining during bowel movements. Symptoms of hemorrhoids include tenderness, pain and itching around your anus and minor rectal bleeding. Frequent warm baths, over-the-counter creams and, in some cases, surgery can help.

### **ULCERS**

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An ulcer is a sore or crater in the lining of the stomach or the small intestine. Ulcers develop when something damages the protective lining and allows stomach acid to eat away at it. Common symptoms include: burning, aching, gnawing or discomfort in your upper abdomen or lower chest; a bloated feeling after meals; pain under your breastbone that comes and goes; and nausea and vomiting. Call your doctor if you suspect you have an ulcer.