

Case: M/50, Asian, Constipation

Doctor: Ok. Mr. Stoll. What brought you here today?

Patient: I have fewer bowel movements than usual and I noticed it's been difficult for me passing out stools.

Doctor: I see. So, when did it start?

Patient: About 3 months ago.

Doctor: Is it getting worse?

Patient: I think so.

Doctor: Before, how often in a week do you have bowel movement?

Patient: Everyday. But now, I only do it twice a week.

Doctor: What is the stool like?

Patient: It's thick and hard.

Doctor: I'm sorry. It must be hard for you. Did you notice any changes in your stool?

Patient: Yes. Before, it's usually light brown. Now, it's sometimes dark brown or greenish in color.

Doctor: I see. Have you seen any blood in it?

Patient: Yes. Sometimes I see streaks of blood in my stool.

Doctor: Do you have any other symptoms?

Patient: Well, I feel bloated and it really makes me uncomfortable.

Doctor: Ok. Do you only have constipation or is it accompanied by diarrhea too?

Patient: No. It's only constipation.

Doctor: How about nausea or vomiting? Any belly pain?

Patient: Yes, I do.

Doctor: Where is your belly pain? Can you point it out?

Patient: It's somewhere here. (LLQ pain)

Doctor: Uh-huh. What is the pain like? Crampy? Sharp? Dull?

Patient: It's somewhat crampy and sometimes dull.

Doctor: Does the pain go away after defecation?

Patient: Sometimes doctor.

Doctor: What about dizziness? Fatigue? Weight loss?

Patient: Actually, I gained weight. Around 10 lbs.

Doctor: I see. What about changes in your appetite?

Patient: It seems the same but there are times I eat lesser than usual because I feel bloated.

Doctor: Ok. Is there anything that makes the constipation worse?

Patient: I guess when I'm not drinking enough fluids.

Doctor: How about something that makes it better?

Patient: Usually, when I eat high-fiber foods and lots of water, I feel better.

Doctor: Have you ever had constipation before?

Patient: Yes, I did. But it only lasted for 2-3 days.

Doctor: Thanks Mr. Stoll. Now, I'm going to ask you some personal questions which can be helpful in getting a diagnosis. Is it alright with you?

Patient: No problem.

Doctor: Thank you. Is there anybody in your family who has health problems? Like cancers, especially colon cancer?

Patient: Well, my dad died of colon cancer and two of my uncles had colon polyps.

Doctor: Ok. Have you done any bowel exams recently? Like colonoscopy?

Patient: No, I haven't.

Doctor: Now, what is your diet like? Are you a meat-lover? Or vegetable-lover?

Patient: I love to eat meat. I don't like eating vegetables.

Doctor: Ok. I'm done. Thank you for answering all these questions Mr. Stoll.

Patient: You're welcome.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE:

- What other questions can you ask a patient with constipation? Give the rationale behind the questions.
- Why is it important to compare the usual characteristics with what the patient is experiencing now?
- Give 1 possible diagnosis for the patient in the scenario above. Explain how you came up with the diagnosis.