



**Title** Stepped Treatment of Older Adults on Laxatives. The STOOL Trial  
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## Aim

1. To investigate the clinical and cost effectiveness of bulk-forming, stimulant, and osmotic laxatives.
2. To investigate the clinical and cost effectiveness of adding a second type of laxative agent in treating patients whose constipation is not resolved by a single agent.
3. To define the meaning of constipation in older people from the perspective of primary care professionals and older patients.
4. To investigate the use of treatments by older people for constipation.
5. To investigate the adherence by older people to prescribed treatments for constipation.

## Conclusions and results

There are no findings from the trial about the clinical or cost effectiveness of different management strategies in treating constipation. General-practitioner participants provided patient-centered definitions that focused on the idea of a change from the norm, as defined by the individual and 'textbook' definitions that focused on reduced frequency associated with a range of unpleasant and other clinical symptoms. Nurses' definitions of constipation included both a patient-centered perspective and the description of particular symptoms associated with constipation. Older participants defined constipation in terms of frequency of bowel movements and changes in normal bowel routine. Older participants reported that constipation is: 1) linked to specific diseases, medical conditions, or health problems; 2) caused by the consumption of specific medications or surgical procedures; 3) caused by diet or eating habits; 4) is part of the aging process; 5) due to not going to the toilet when one has the urge to defecate; 6) hereditary; 7) caused by stress or worry; and 8) caused by environmental exposure.

## Recommendations

1. Constipation means different things to different people.
2. There is little shared understanding between patients and professionals about 'normal' bowel function.
3. There is little consensus in general practice of the optimum management strategies for chronic constipation, and there is continuing uncertainty about the most effective strategies to employ.
4. Chronic constipation is seen as less important than other prevalent conditions, eg, diabetes, in general practice because it was not an agreed management target. Hence, practitioners had little interest in constipation as a research topic.

## Methods

See Executive Summary link at [www.nchta.org/execsumm/summ1213.shtml](http://www.nchta.org/execsumm/summ1213.shtml).

## Further research/reviews required

Studies are required: 1) to investigate different methods of recruitment within the constraints of current ethical guidelines on 'opting in'; 2) to identify barriers and facilitators to recruitment to complex trials in general; and 3) to investigate the effectiveness or cost effectiveness of different laxatives and treatment strategies in managing chronic constipation using patient preference trials and natural cohort observational studies.