



Bowel Obstruction – Low Risk

A bowel obstruction is a serious condition that happens when food or waste cannot move through the bowel. This obstruction can be considered complete or partial and can occur in the small intestine or large intestine. A bowel obstruction may be due to a mechanical cause (something is in the way) or an ileus - a condition where the bowel does not work correctly; however there is no structural problem causing it. The individual may not have any bowel or abdominal disorders. He or she may be physically active and mobile and has a good nutritional/fluid intake and therefore be at **low risk** for developing a bowel obstruction.

Causes/risks of bowel obstruction include but are not limited to:

- Impacted stool
- Hernias
- Tumors
- Decreased mobility
- Twisting of the intestines
- History of abdominal surgery
- Foreign bodies (items that are swallowed and block the intestines)
- Intestinal infections
- Medications (especially narcotics or psychotropic medications).

Symptoms of a bowel obstruction may include but are not limited to:

- Abdominal swelling
- Abdominal pain/cramping
- Constipation
- Vomiting
- Nausea
- Watery or thin stool
- Blood in stool
- Inability to pass gas

A complete intestinal obstruction is a medical emergency!

Recommendations: Awareness of risk is important. Be alert to symptoms of changes in a person's health status and seek guidance from a health professional. If individual is hospitalized, consider re-evaluating risk.

Although they may be at low risk, it is still important to be aware of bowel obstruction symptoms and common causes of bowel obstructions. Report any changes in an individual's bowel regimen to a healthcare professional.



Virginia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Services

Please note: this information is not intended to replace the advice of a doctor. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health providers with any questions about your medical condition.

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