

A Guide for Patients and Families

Intestinal Obstruction



What is Intestinal Obstruction?

Intestinal obstruction is a blockage in the small intestine or large intestine that prevents food, liquid or gas from passing through.

Without treatment, the blocked parts of the intestine can die, leading to serious problems. However, with immediate medical care, it can be successfully treated.



What causes Intestinal Obstruction?



Tumors, scar tissue (adhesions), or twisting or narrowing of the intestines can cause a bowel obstruction. These are called **mechanical obstructions**.



In the small intestine, scar tissue is most often the cause. Other causes include hernias and Crohn's disease, which can twist or narrow the intestine, and tumors, which can block the intestine. A blockage also can happen if one part of the intestine folds like a telescope into another part, which is called **intussusception**.



In the large intestine, cancer is most often the cause. Other causes are severe constipation from a hard mass of stool, and narrowing of the intestine caused by diverticulitis or inflammatory bowel disease.

Signs and Symptoms



Abdominal swelling and bloating



Abdominal pain or cramps



Constipation



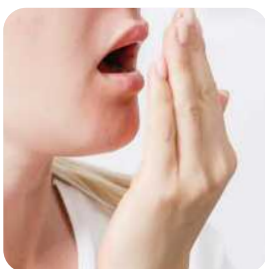
Diarrhoea



Vomiting



Unable to pass gas



Foul breath

Test and Diagnosis



First, the doctor will ask for your medical history and symptoms. Doctor will then perform a physical examination to look for abdominal swelling or the presence of a lump in your abdomen. Doctor may also listen to your abdomen to detect obstructions.

To diagnose or confirm intestinal obstruction, the doctor may recommend an abdominal X-ray or computerised tomography (CT) scan. It helps to locate the site and determine the cause of obstruction.



Treatment



A nasogastric tube may be inserted through your nose into your stomach to remove fluid and gas. This will relieve your abdominal swelling.

You will be given intravenous fluids to prevent dehydration as you will not be given any food or drink.



If you are experiencing only partial obstruction, you may not need further treatment. The doctor may recommend a low-fibre diet that will be easier for your blocked intestine to process.

However, if the obstruction does not clear on its own, you may need surgery.



If the affected part of your intestine has died, the diseased part of the intestine will be removed, and the remaining part may be sewn to an opening in the skin to create a colostomy or ileostomy. Stool passes out of the body through the opening and collects in a disposable ostomy bag.

This can be temporary until you have fully recovered.

Others

Your doctors and nurses will further advise you on the follow-up care according to treatment given to you. Please consult them for more information when necessary.

