



# SPOTLIGHT ON **PREVENTION**

Partnering to protect people  
with special needs

## **INTESTINAL OBSTRUCTION FACT SHEET**

The NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs (Justice Center) is committed to supporting and protecting the health, safety, and dignity of people with special needs. Justice Center efforts to fulfill this commitment include prevention materials that target specific areas of abuse and neglect. Material such as this fact sheet is offered as a prevention resource and is not meant as medical or professional advice.

People who have compromised health conditions and/or use certain medications may be at higher risk of intestinal

obstructions. Untreated intestinal obstructions can result in serious harm to a person's health, including death. The conditions that contribute to intestinal obstruction, early detection and intervention strategies are provided below. With an increased understanding of this condition, people in care, providers and family members can play a key role in the prevention and timely response to signs and symptoms of intestinal obstruction.



**Justice Center for the  
Protection of People  
with Special Needs**

[www.justicecenter.ny.gov](http://www.justicecenter.ny.gov) | 1 (800) 624-4143

## What is an intestinal obstruction?

An intestinal obstruction is a potentially serious condition in which the intestines are blocked. The blockage may be either partial or complete, occurring at one or more locations in the intestines. Both the small intestine and large intestine, called the colon, can be affected. When a

blockage occurs, food and drink cannot pass through the body. Obstructions are serious and need to be treated immediately. They may even require surgery.

Source: <https://www.healthline.com/health/intestinal-obstructions>

## Maintaining healthy bowel functions:

- Consult with a dietician to develop a dietary plan that includes a well-balanced diet with increased fiber and fluid intake.
- If needed, obtain daily over-the-counter bulking, softening and/or lubricating agents.
- Increase exercise and mobility, consult with physical therapist if necessary.
- Treat underlying disorders/conditions.
- Foster a bowel movement schedule including optimal time and privacy for bowel movements.
- Be mindful of changes related to person's diet, medication regimen, and/or behaviors.
- If indicated, be cognizant of the person's bowel routine and protocols and seek medical intervention in a timely manner.

Source: New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Vulnerable Persons' Central Register database

## Common symptoms of bowel obstruction:

intermittent abdominal cramping or pain	nausea and vomiting
severe abdominal pain	cessation of ability to pass gas
bloating	distension or swelling of the abdomen
loss of appetite	constipation/inability to have a bowel movement

Source: <https://www.healthline.com/health/intestinal-obstructions#symptoms>

## Contact a medical professional:

If a person is having abdominal pain, loose stools, distension of the abdomen, vomiting or fever, a health care professional should be contacted to assess the person, these symptoms may indicate a serious medical problem.

Source: [https://opwdd.ny.gov/sites/default/files/documents/psa\\_bowelmgmt.pdf](https://opwdd.ny.gov/sites/default/files/documents/psa_bowelmgmt.pdf)



## Complications if bowel obstruction is left untreated:

- Tissue Death: intestinal obstruction can prevent blood flow that leads to tissue death and infection
- Infection: infection in the abdomen is life-threatening and requires immediate medical and often surgical attention.
- Death

Source: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/intestinal-obstruction/symptoms-causes/syc-20351460>