



PATIENTS IN FOCUS:

Constipation treatment and perceptions

Phreesia

Life
Sciences

Table of contents

Executive summary.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Suffering in silence	5
Moving patients away from OTC medications	8
Raising awareness of prescription options.....	9
Providing patient resources.....	10
Recommendations.....	13



Executive summary

Constipation, which is generally defined as fewer than three bowel movements a week or difficulty passing bowel movements,¹ affects millions of Americans, and there are good reasons to believe that number is rising. Because the condition is more common among older adults—age-related issues including decreased mobility, various comorbidities and increased use of medications that cause constipation may all contribute to its prevalence in the elderly—the addressable patient population for pharma companies should continue to grow within the aging communities found in many major markets.²

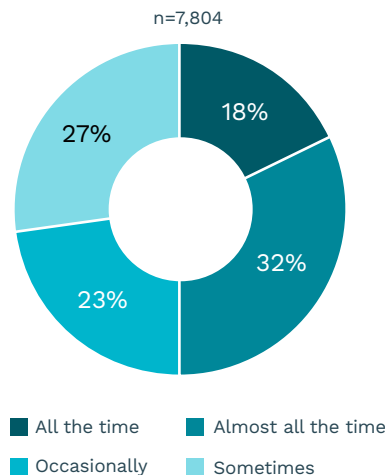
Still, the market for prescription constipation therapies remains underdeveloped. AbbVie and Ironwood's Linzess leads the category, but sales in 2021 barely topped \$1 billion.³ The prevalence of constipation—and its impact on patients' daily lives—suggest there's room for drugmakers to increase constipation medication uptake in the coming years.

What marketing strategies and messaging will enable that growth? This report seeks to answer that question using survey results collected on Phreesia's PatientInsights platform in October and November 2021 from 6,780 adults age 18 and older as they checked in for their doctors' appointments. All survey participants had been diagnosed with or treated for constipation.

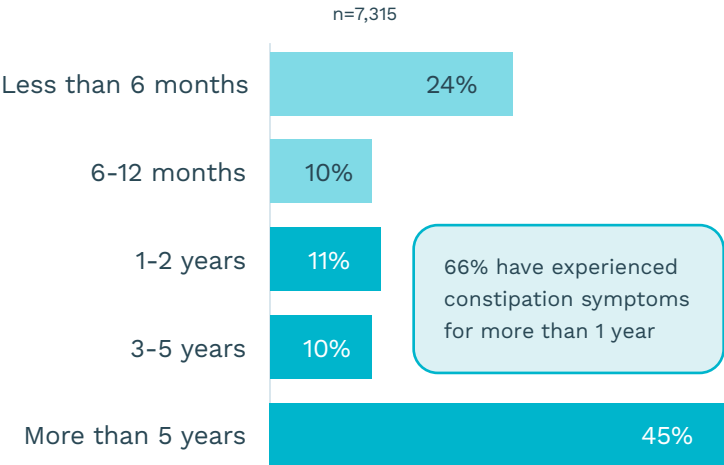
Introduction

Millions of people live with constipation. By one estimate, 16% of all adults and 33% of those over age 60 suffer from the condition.⁴ These figures suggest that prescription constipation treatments should be among the best-known and most widely used therapies on the market. However, many people have yet to find treatments that adequately control their symptoms.

How often do you experience constipation symptoms?



How long have you experienced constipation symptoms?



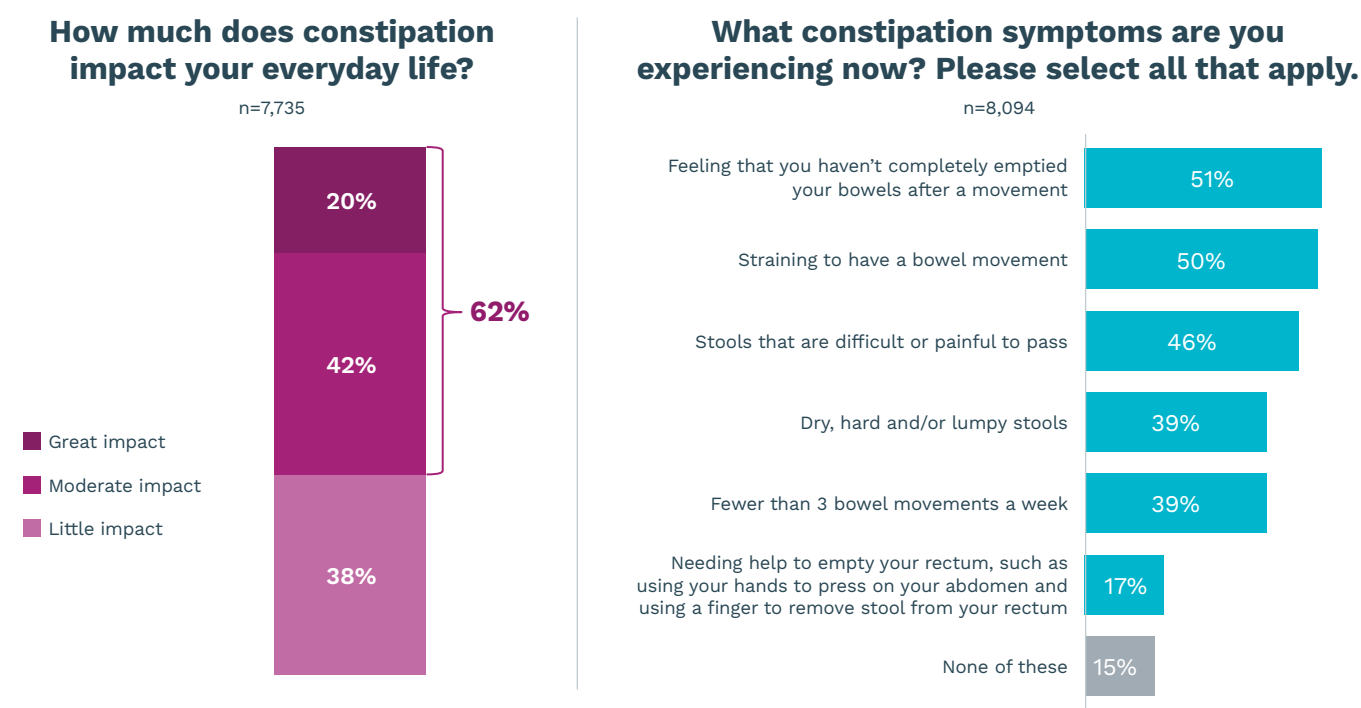
On the contrary, half of the survey’s respondents said they experience constipation all or almost all of the time—and a significant percentage have been suffering for years. Nearly half of surveyed patients (45%) said they’ve been dealing with their symptoms for more than five years, and 21% have experienced symptoms for one to five years. That means two-thirds of the survey’s participants have been living with constipation for at least 12 months.



Nearly half of surveyed patients said they’ve been dealing with their constipation symptoms for more than five years



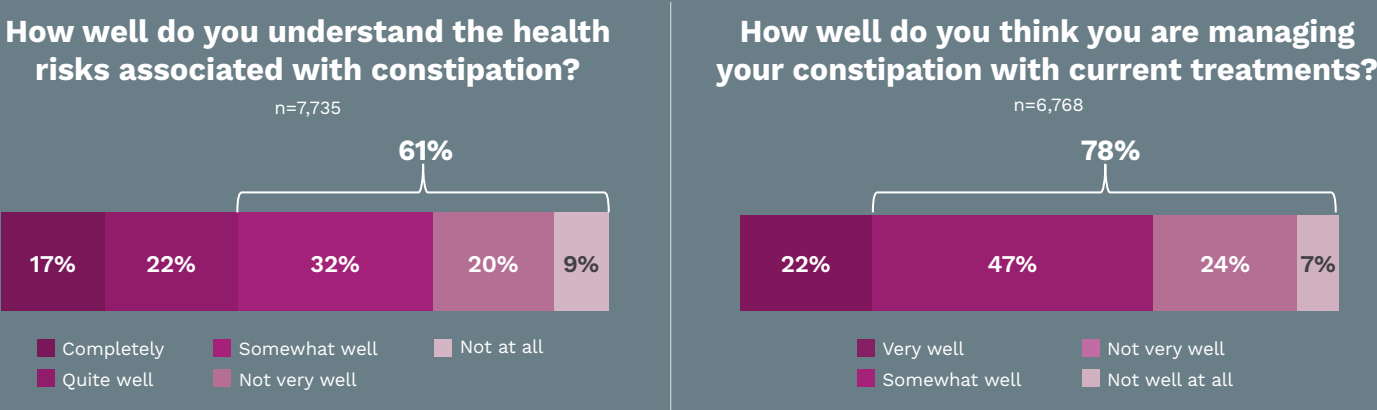
Unsurprisingly, those symptoms are seriously affecting patients' quality of life, with 62% of surveyed patients saying that constipation has a moderate or great impact on their everyday life. Slightly more than half of surveyed patients (51%) said their most common symptom was the feeling of not having completely emptied their bowels after a movement, followed closely by straining to have bowel movements (50%) and passing difficult or painful stools (46%).



Suffering in silence

Beyond significant discomfort, long-term constipation can cause hemorrhoids, fecal impaction and bowel incontinence.⁵ Yet few patients have a good grasp of the health risks associated with the condition.

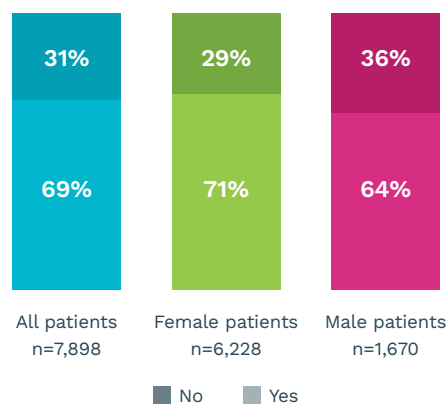
Only 17% of surveyed patients claimed to completely understand those risks, and 61% said they understood the risks of constipation “somewhat well” to “not at all.” These contrasting figures not only point to the need for more patient education—they spotlight an opportunity to activate patients by urging them to address their constipation symptoms before further complications develop.



Patients’ limited understanding of constipation likely contributes to their lack of confidence in how well they feel they’re managing their condition, with 78% of survey respondents saying they are managing it “somewhat well” to “not well at all.” And while talking to their doctor could potentially improve patients’ understanding and management of constipation, they rarely bring it up with their providers.

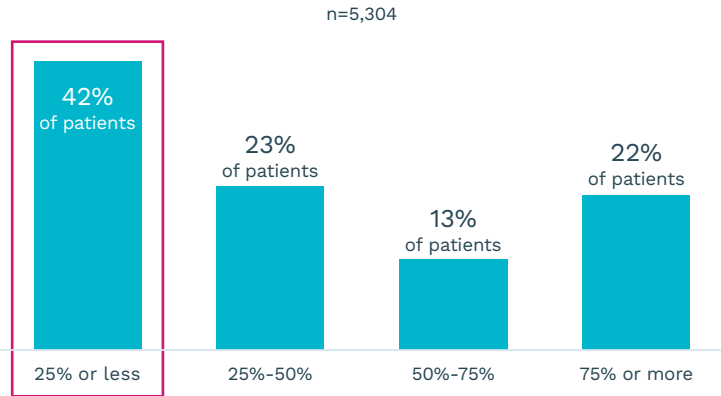
Nearly one-third (31%) of respondents said they have never discussed constipation with their doctor, survey results show. And discussions are rare even among those who have raised the topic, with 41% of patients saying that they brought up their constipation symptoms in fewer than 1 in 4 appointments. Primary care providers are most likely to discuss constipation with their patients: 77% of patients who had talked to a provider about constipation had done so with a primary care physician. However, surveyed patients said they also have discussed their constipation symptoms with gastroenterologists and other specialists, nurses, pharmacists and others.

Have you ever talked to your healthcare provider about your constipation symptoms?



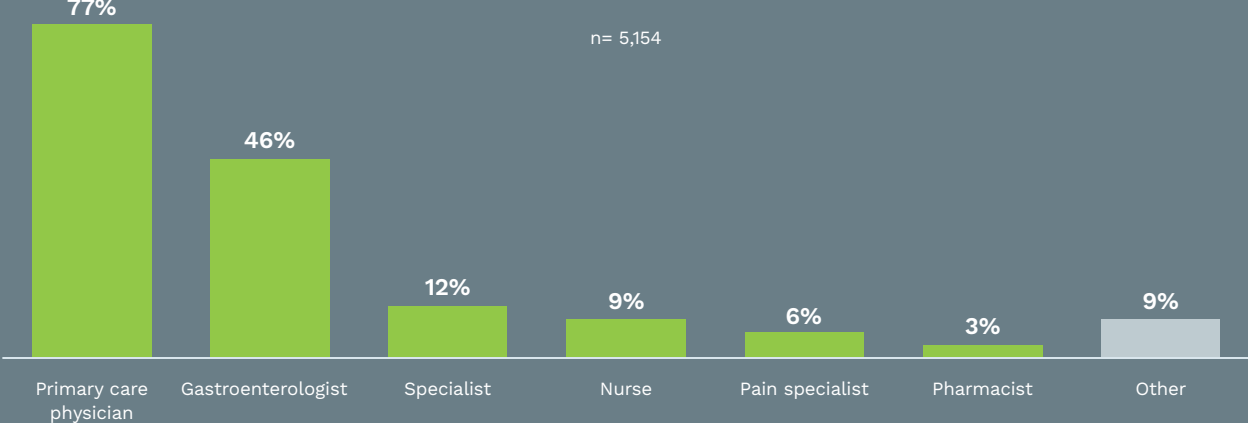
In what percentage of your doctor’s appointments have you mentioned your constipation symptoms?

Among patients who have discussed constipation with their doctor



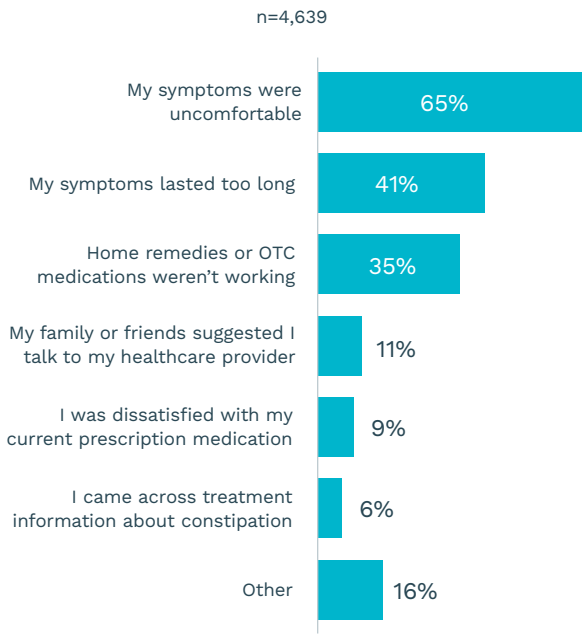
Which type of healthcare provider have you talked to about your constipation symptoms? Please select all that apply.

Among patients who have discussed constipation with their doctor

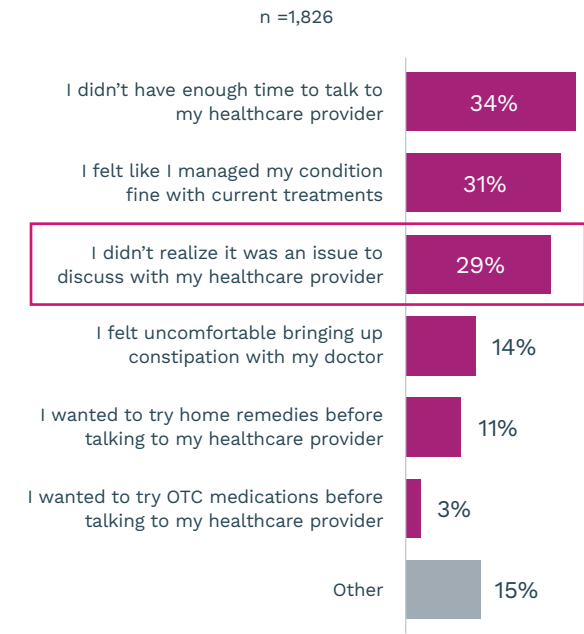


When discussions do happen, it's typically because a patient's constipation has become too uncomfortable (65%), the symptoms are lasting too long (41%) or over-the-counter (OTC) constipation medications, which are not meant for long-term use, are ineffective (35%). Patients who had never talked to their physician about their constipation cited lack of time (34%), satisfaction with their existing treatment (31%) and/or lack of awareness that constipation could be discussed with their provider (29%) as their top reasons for not bringing up their symptoms.

Why did you talk to your doctor about your constipation symptoms? Please select all that apply.



Why haven't you talked with your healthcare provider about constipation yet? Please select all that apply.



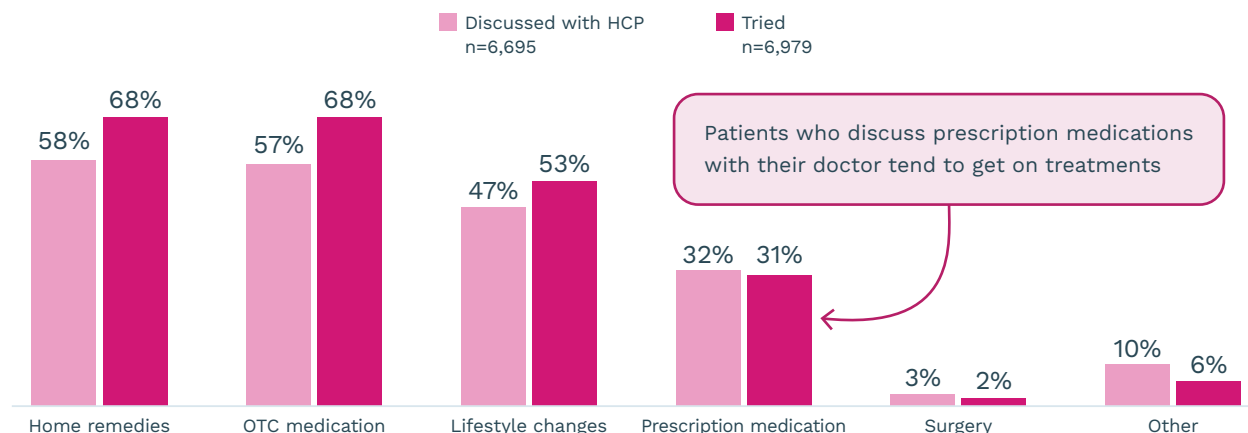
For uptake of prescription constipation therapies to increase, patients must understand that their symptoms are worth discussing and worthy of prescription therapy. Reaching patients just before their appointments with impactful messages and relevant resources about their condition can encourage them to talk to their doctor and facilitate important care conversations about constipation that can help bring an end to their silent suffering.



Moving patients away from OTC medications

Meaningful patient-provider conversations also can help patients using over-the-counter therapies that aren't adequately managing their constipation. The survey found that 32% of respondents have discussed prescription constipation medications with their physicians, and 31% have tried them, suggesting that these discussions tend to lead to prescriptions.

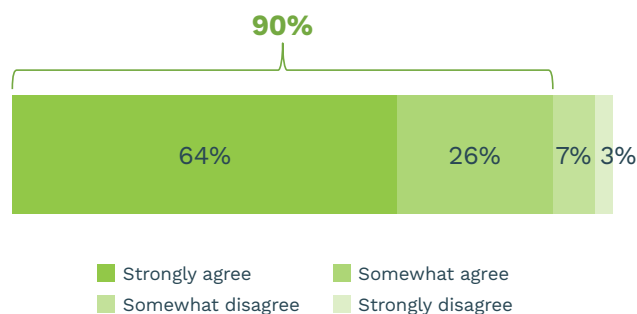
What types of constipation treatments have you discussed with your doctor and/or tried? Please select all that apply.



Nevertheless, at 68% each, home remedies and OTC medications are still the most widely used constipation therapies. More than one-third (34%) of survey respondents were using an OTC constipation treatment at the time of the survey. But these drugs are not meant for long-term use—and although 90% of respondents said they understood that, half of them also said they have taken an OTC constipation medication for more than a year. And an additional 10% of patients have used an OTC constipation drug for six to 12 months.

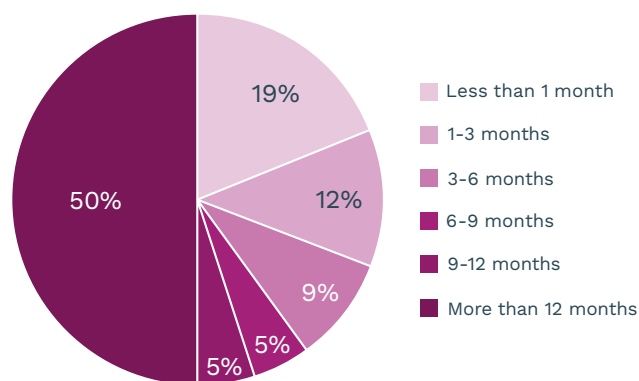
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? OTC medication for constipation is not meant for long-term use.

n=6,457



How long have you used OTC medication to treat your constipation?

n=4,282



Engaging patients at the point of care can help change these habits by encouraging them to start provider conversations that may lead to prescription therapy that is more suitable for long-term use. Providing doctor discussion guides, prescription savings information and other resources just before their appointments can empower patients and help them navigate constipation treatment conversations with their doctor.

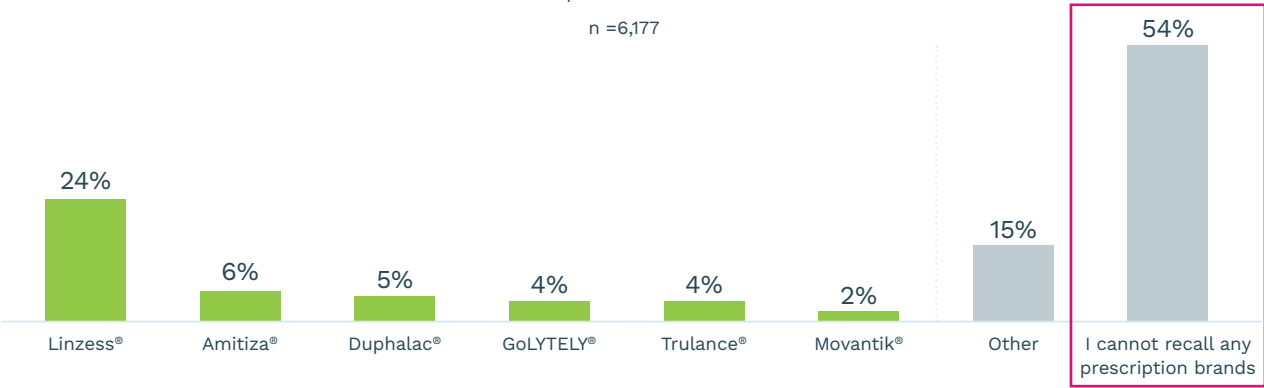
Raising awareness of prescription options

To improve prescription therapy uptake, ramping up patients' awareness of their constipation medication options is vital. More than half (54%) of survey respondents could not recall a single prescription brand in the category. The most widely recognized brand, AbbVie and Ironwood's Linzess, was familiar to 24% of respondents. But only 2% to 6% of respondents knew about Mallinckrodt's Amitiza, Abbott's Duphalac, Braintree Laboratories' GoLYTELY, Salix Pharmaceuticals' Trulance or RedHill Biopharma's Movantik. That limited awareness presents a clear opportunity for pharma marketers.



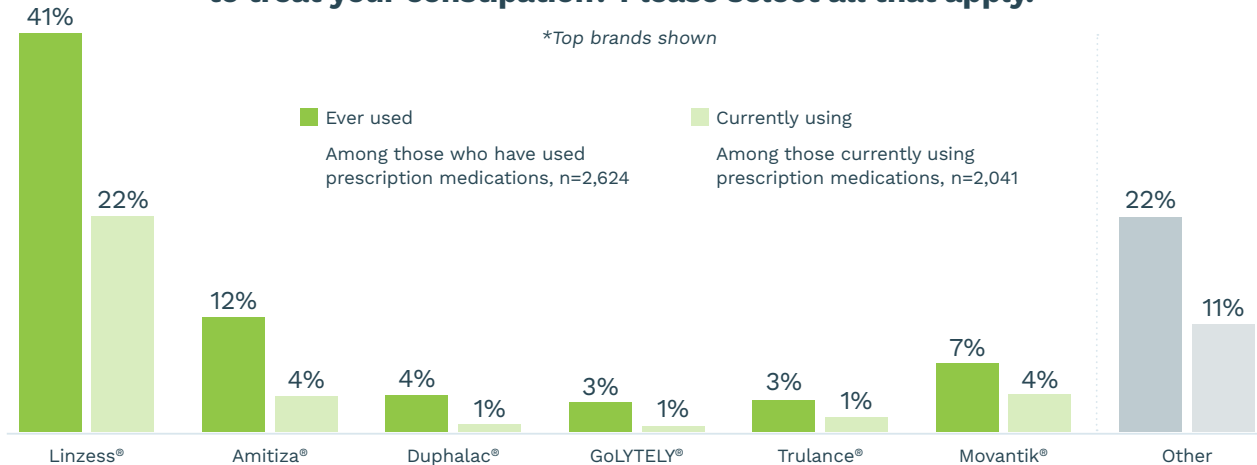
Which of the following prescription brands come to mind for constipation? Please select all that apply.*

*Top brands shown
n = 6,177



The survey findings also indicated that patient retention is another significant challenge. While 41% of polled patients said they have taken Linzess, only 22% were still taking it at the time of the survey. Other brands saw similarly steep usage declines, albeit from much smaller numbers of initial users. This pattern is concerning, since medication adherence is crucial for relieving constipation, some forms of which are chronic.

What Rx medications have you used/are you currently using to treat your constipation? Please select all that apply.*



However, there are opportunities to convert both lapsed and current users of prescription constipation medications to new brands. Survey results indicated that 70% of patients who have already tried a prescription constipation medication would likely try a different brand, potentially reflecting their limited satisfaction with existing treatments: Only 12% to 22% of patients said they are “very satisfied” with the top brands from the survey.

Percent of patients who are likely to try a prescription medication for constipation

Among those who have not tried a prescription medication, n=4,014

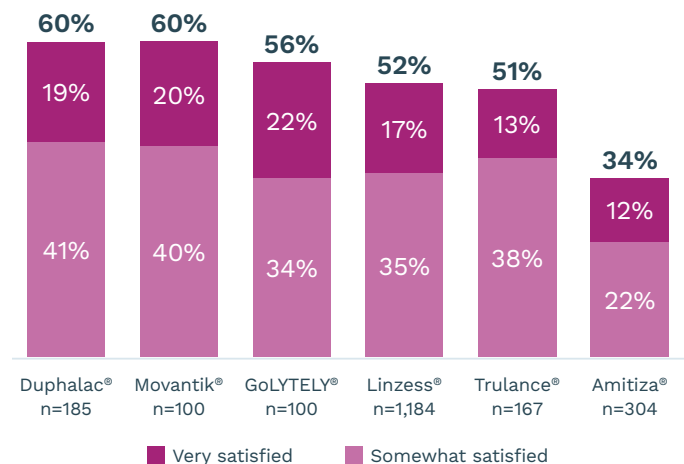


Percent of patients who are likely to try a new prescription medication for constipation

Among those who have already tried a prescription medication, n=1,798



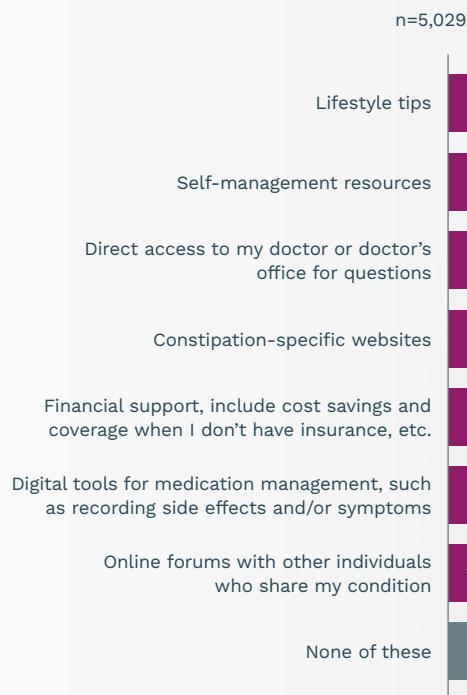
How satisfied are you with these medications to treat your constipation?



Providing patient resources

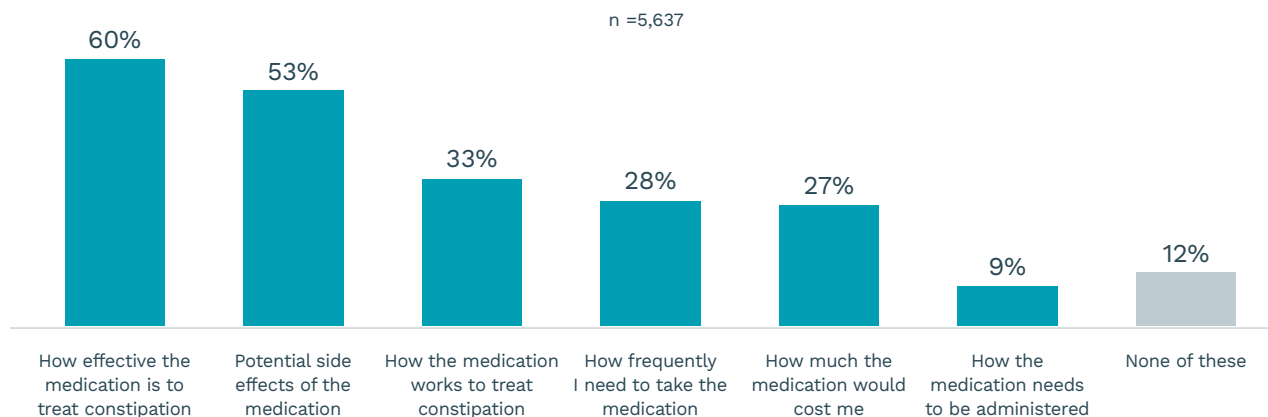
Those who suffer with constipation also want more information about their condition. Specifically, the survey found that patients are most likely to consider lifestyle tips (41%), self-management resources (38%) and direct access to their doctor for questions (32%) to help manage their symptoms. And 23% of patients also included constipation-specific websites as one of their top three resources for managing their constipation.

What type of resources would be most helpful for managing your constipation? Please select up to 3 answers.



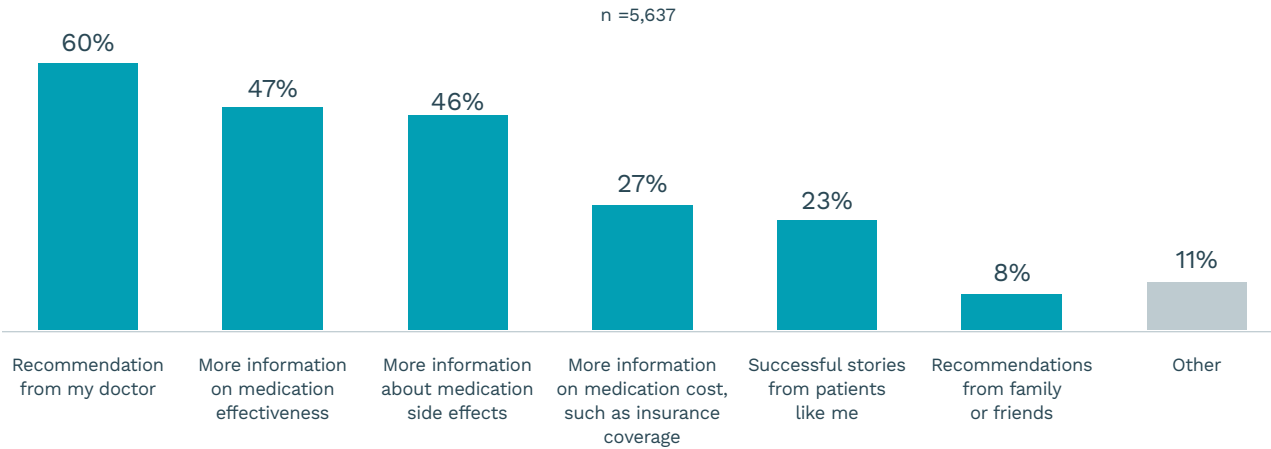
Better-informed patients may make new treatment decisions in partnership with their doctor. Survey respondents were most likely to consider the effectiveness of a drug (60%) and its potential side effects (53%) among their top three most important considerations in choosing a new constipation medication. But while safety and effectiveness are patients' top priorities, dosing frequency and out-of-pocket costs are additional differentiators that matter to them, cited by 28% and 27% of respondents, respectively.

Which factors below are most important to you when choosing a medication for constipation? Please select up to 3 answers.



Changing how constipation is treated also will require providing more information and resources to physicians: Some 60% of surveyed patients said their doctor’s recommendation would most motivate them to try a new prescription constipation medicine, making it their top determinant, ahead of more information about effectiveness (47%) and medication side effects (46%).

What information is important for motivating you to try a new prescription medication for your constipation? Please select all that apply.



Recommendations:



Raise awareness that effective prescription treatments are available for treating constipation



Educate patients about the additional health risks associated with long-term constipation to motivate them to take action and treat their condition



Explain and promote that prescription treatments act on the constipation symptoms that matter most to patients, such as incomplete and painful bowel movements



Arm patients with doctor discussion guides and other resources to help them speak up about their symptoms and navigate treatment conversations with their provider



Get patients thinking about their constipation symptoms and prescription medications just before they see their provider to trigger conversations that can drive adoption of new treatments



Provide the lifestyle tips and self-management resources that patients with constipation want, thereby building connections and awareness across the patient journey

About Phreesia Life Sciences

Phreesia empowers life sciences companies to connect meaningfully with clinically relevant patients, delivering targeted health content in a one-to-one setting. Our PatientConnect offering identifies and motivates the right patients to initiate meaningful brand conversations, and our PatientInsights product enables our clients to better understand their target patient populations.

Phreesia meets patients where they are, both virtually and in-person, and reaches them at multiple touchpoints throughout their healthcare journey.

To learn more about Phreesia Life Sciences, visit lifesciences.phreesia.com.

End notes

- 1 [Constipation](#), Mayo Clinic, August 31, 2021.
- 2 [“Epidemiology and burden of chronic constipation,”](#) Can. J. Gastroenterol., October 2011.
- 3 [“AbbVie Reports Full-Year and Fourth-Quarter 2021 Financial Results,”](#) AbbVie, February 2, 2022.
- 4 [“American Gastroenterological Association medical position statement on constipation,”](#) Gastroenterology, January 2013.
- 5 [Constipation](#), NHS inform, November 13, 2020.

