

Healthy Bowel Information for patients

Frequency of bowel emptying varies between individuals and can be affected by a number of factors. Often simple changes can help resolve bowel problems.

Lifestyle

Make time for your bowels. Most bowels respond best to a regular habit. About 30 minutes after eating is the most likely time for your bowels to work. This is because of the 'gastro-colic response' – eating sets waves of activity in motion in the bowel.

Correct positioning

It is very important **not** to ignore the 'call to stool'.

Give yourself enough time to sit correctly on the toilet. Using a foot stool to raise your feet 20cm-30cm (8-10 inches) high helps to improve the angle of the rectum within the pelvis and make it easier to pass stools. Relax and breathe normally.

Medication

Some medicines (prescribed or bought from the chemist) could aggravate your bowel symptoms. Ask your doctor or chemist if they could contribute to your constipation; if possible try to avoid these medications.

Fluid intake

Try to drink at least 1.5 litres (6 - 8 cups) of fluid daily, unless advised otherwise by your doctor. Try to limit the amount of caffeine (refer to our 'Fluid Advice' leaflet) and alcohol you drink as this can irritate the bowels as well as cause dehydration.

Fibre intake

Eating regularly is the best stimulant for your bowels. Try not to skip meals especially breakfast as this can lead to a sluggish or irregular bowel habit.

There are two types of dietary fibre, **soluble** and **insoluble**. Both types are needed for good bowel health because they have different properties and benefits. Balance your fibre intake. Too much fibre can lead to an increase in bloating/discomfort and loose bowel motion. Too little could lead to constipation.

Soluble Fibre – (Fruit and vegetables)

Insoluble Fibre (Whole grains, seeds and nuts and cereals).

Be aware of natural laxatives, (liquorice, chocolate, prunes, figs and spicy food).

Keep active

Lack of physical activity can contribute to constipation. Being inactive can slow down the digestive system, which means that stools are hard, difficult to pass or not passed at all. The bowels respond to exercise by stimulating the digestive system to work regularly, be careful not to overdo it.

Other options

If you have tried all the steps in this leaflet and you are still having problems with your bowels, please talk to your healthcare professional for further advice and management.

For further advice or information please contact:

Continence Team

024 7696 1427

or

District Nurses

0300 200 0011

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