

Managing constipation

Constipation is the word usually used to describe an unusually slow bowel habit where the poo is often hard, dry and difficult to pass on the toilet. It can be a problem that comes and goes.

tips

Tips for managing constipation

- 1** Eat at least three meals each day. Try not to skip meals
- 2** Gradually increase the amount of soluble and insoluble fibre in your diet, especially wholegrains such as breakfast cereals
- 3** Choose more raw fruits and vegetables – and eat the skin, if you can



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- 4 Read food labels and choose foods with a good content of "dietary fibre"
- 5 Drink plenty of fluids – including water – regularly during the day
- 6 Go to bed at a regular time each night, to help make sure you get enough sleep
- 7 Deep breathing exercises and relaxation can help you cope if you feel stressed/tense
- 8 Avoid sitting down for long periods of time
- 9 Walking (even gently) for at least for 20 minutes, twice a day

If you are having difficulty opening your bowels regularly, talk to your GP, nurse or other health specialist about it.



If you have not had a bowel movement for several days and are experiencing pain, nausea or vomiting, seek medical advice immediately.



Foods that may help to ease constipation include:

- » Wholegrain cereals
- » Beans and lentils
- » Fruits – fresh and dried, including figs, plums, rhubarb, apricots and pears
- » Porridge oats
- » Pearl barley
- » Ground flaxseeds (linseeds)
- » Liquorice
- » Cruciferous vegetables (e.g. broccoli, cauliflower)
- » Root vegetables (e.g. carrots, beetroot, parsnips)
- » Dark green, leafy vegetables

High fibre foods may need to be added **slowly** and in much **smaller portions**. They need to be **soft, well-cooked and well-chewed**. This is especially important for patients with a stoma.

N.B. Beetroot can make your urine and poo look red.

tips

Other handy tips for constipation include:

- 1 Alternately drinking a hot drink and then a very cold drink may help to stimulate a reflex to open the bowel
- 2 Sitting in a squatting position on the toilet, with the knees bent and the feet raised on a stool can also help you to use the right muscles to empty the bowel
- 3 Firm massage of the abdomen in a clock wise movement can also help to stimulate movement of the bowel and relieve bloating and wind



Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist may recommend medications that can help with constipation

- » **Stool softeners** (for hard poo that is difficult to pass)
- » **Laxatives** (for a slow bowel habit)



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