

Constipation



What is it and how can I treat it?

Constipation is a common problem. It means either going to the toilet less often than usual to empty the bowels, or passing hard or painful poo. Constipation may be caused by not eating enough fibre, or not drinking enough fluids. It can also be a side-effect of some medicines or related to a medical condition. In many cases, the cause is not clear. Many people only experience constipation for a short period of time with no lasting effects on their health.

Constipation can be eased and prevented by eating more fibre such as wholemeal or wholewheat bread, brown rice and wholemeal pasta, wholegrain breakfast cereals and eating 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day. You might like to include fruit that contain sorbitol (a naturally occurring sugar that has an effect of softening your poo) such as apples, apricots, gooseberries, grapes (and raisins), peaches, pears, plums, prunes, raspberries and strawberries. You should also drink plenty of water, about 8-10 cups each day. As a start try drinking a glass of water 3-4 times a day in addition to what you normally drink.

And keeping your body active helps to keep your gut moving so exercise regularly if possible.

Do not ignore the feeling of needing to go to the toilet. If you suppress this feeling because you are busy it may result in a backlog of poo that is difficult to pass later. When you go to the toilet, it should be unhurried, with enough time to ensure that you can empty your bowel.

Laxatives can also be used to treat constipation but these should only be needed if the dietary and exercise measures above do not work. There are several types of laxatives which work in different ways and the time they take to work can vary. Talk to your pharmacist about the one that is best for you.

Laxatives can be bought from your pharmacy, supermarket or store but you should visit your GP if your symptoms persist. More information on constipation can be found by visiting www.nhs.uk

If you would like a copy of this document in large print, Braille or on audio tape, or if you would like this information explained in another language please telephone 01707 369705.