

MANAGING CONSTIPATION

A guide for adults










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WHAT IS CONSTIPATION?

Constipation is a condition where you have difficulty passing faeces (poo), either by not being able to pass it at all, or by finding it difficult to pass.

You are likely to be constipated if:

- You have not had a poo at least 3 times during the last week
- The poo is unusually large or small and is dry, hard or lumpy
- You are straining or in pain when you have a poo
- You feel like you haven't fully emptied your bowel
- You may also have a stomach ache and feel bloated or sick
- Your poo is type 1-3 in the below chart

Stool type		Description
Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
Type 2		Sausage-shaped but lumpy
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on the surface
Type 4		Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
Type 5		Soft blobs with clear cut edges
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces. Entirely Liquid

WHAT CAUSES CONSTIPATION?

There are many different reasons that you may be constipated, but it isn't always obvious what the cause of it is.

The most common causes include:

- Not eating enough fibre, which is found in fruits, vegetables, beans, pulses and cereals
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not moving enough and spending long periods sitting or lying down
- Not exercising or being physically active
- Often ignoring the urge to go to the toilet
- Changing your diet or daily routine
- A side effect of medicine
- Stress, anxiety or depression
- During pregnancy and after birth
- If you are over 65 years of age
- Some medical conditions such as diverticular disease or bowel cancer

Constipation affects around 1 in 7 adults in the UK.

WHAT MIGHT HELP?

1 Add fibre into your diet

You should aim to have 30g of fibre in your diet each day. The average fibre intake in the UK is only 18g, just 60% of what is recommended.

Fibre is found in plant-based foods, and moves through your bowel undigested. It adds bulk and softens your stools, helping your bowel to function properly.

Increase your fibre intake by:

- Ensuring you have the recommended 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day
- Adding nuts and seeds to high fibre breakfast cereals, porridge or fruit and yoghurt
- Adding extra beans and pulses into pasta sauces, curries, soups and casseroles
- Choosing whole-grain pasta, brown rice and seeded breads
- Check food labels - look for foods with at least 3g of fibre per 100g

Eating a wide range of different fibres can:



Prevent constipation



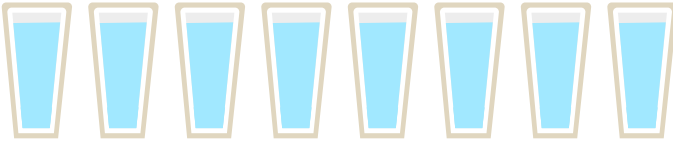
Enhance immunity



Reduce inflammation
in your gut

2 Increase fluid intake

Aim to drink at least 8 cups per day (or at least 2 litres).

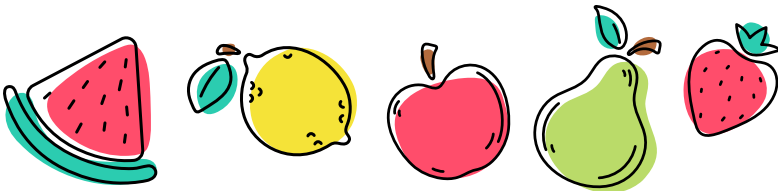


This doesn't just have to be water though. Juice, squash, milk and decaffeinated hot drinks can be included in your fluid intake.



Hydration tip

Add fruit and veg to jazz up your water. You can add cucumber, lemons, limes, berries, mint or basil to a jug of water with lots of ice to enjoy throughout the day.



WHAT MIGHT HELP?

3 Increase physical activity

Being physically active helps to support your bowel function. Exercise can help to strengthen your abdominal muscles and stimulate the bowel, helping to move poo through the bowel. It can also help to reduce stress which can be a constipation trigger.

NHS recommendations

- Do some type of physical activity every day
- At least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity a week (brisk walking, bike riding, mowing the lawn)
- 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week (running, swimming or skipping)
- Exercises to improve your strength, balance and flexibility on at least 2 days each week



4 Adjusting your toileting routines

- Have a regular toilet routine, ensuring that your bowel movement is complete
- Visit the toilet as soon as you feel the sensation of needing to have a poo
- Try resting your feet on a stool while going to the toilet, raising your knees above your hips



5 Speak with your GP

You can often treat constipation yourself by making simple changes to your diet and lifestyle, but if these changes don't help you should seek advice from your GP. Your GP may recommend oral laxative medications that can help to empty your bowels or fibre supplements to help to support your dietary changes, optimise your fibre intake, and improve your gut health.

Useful resources

There are a range of online websites and resources that can provide you with advice and support for managing constipation.

Bladder & Bowel UK

www.bbuk.org.uk

Working to improve awareness and find solutions to bladder and bowel problems across the nation.

ERIC

eric.org.uk

ERIC is the national charity dedicated to improving children's bowel and bladder health, whose mission is to reduce the impact of continence problems on children and their families.

NHS

www.nhs.uk/conditions/constipation

Nutribytes

www.youtube.com/@nutribytes2532

A team of dietitians, who aim to provide resources and content that are easy to read and understand. This includes short, bite-sized videos. Look for "Managing adult constipation" and "Childhood constipation" videos.

Nutrinovo

nutrinovo.com/patient-resources