



How can I look after my bowel?

This leaflet gives you tips on how to look after your bowel and keep it working normally.

How does a normal bowel work?

How often people open their bowels (go for a poo) varies. Normal can be anything from three times per day to three times per week, **provided that this is normal for you**. Changes in bowel habit for longer than three weeks should always be investigated. If you notice blood in your poo, or it is very dark and sticky, tell your doctor.

Normally, your poo should be shaped like a sausage and formed, but reasonably soft and easy to pass. If your poo is very hard and difficult to pass, or comes out in little pellets like rabbit droppings, then you are constipated; especially if you are not going very often.

If your poo is very mushy or liquid, and you are going quite frequently, then you have diarrhoea.

Your large bowel (colon or large intestine) travels up the right hand side of your abdomen (tummy), across the top, and then comes down again on the left hand side of your tummy, where it joins the rectum (back passage). During your poo's journey along the bowel, it gradually becomes solid as your body takes out any water it needs.

What can I do about my constipation?

If your constipation is new and has lasted for more than three weeks, tell your ward doctor (or GP if you have left hospital).

Usually, people become constipated due to what they are eating or drinking. If you are not eating enough fibre and you are not drinking enough fluids, this can make your constipation worse.

Also, your tummy likes movement – so if you lie or sit for too long without getting up and moving, your bowel can become a little sluggish.

Try these tips:

- Make sure you are drinking enough – 1½ - 2 litres (2½ - 3½ pints) per day
- Try adding things like prune juice, coconut water and pomegranate juice into your diet
- Eat dried fruits, for example dried apricots, prunes, dates, raisins, sultanas etc.
- Have wholegrain bread rather than white bread
- Eat plenty of vegetables and fresh fruit
- Get up and move around regularly – go for a little walk!
- Do not delay the urge to go for a poo. If you feel you need a poo, then you should go.

What can I do about my diarrhoea?

If your diarrhoea is new and has lasted for more than three weeks, tell your ward doctor (or GP if you have left hospital).

Sometimes people have diarrhoea due to an infection; if this is the case, your doctors will already be giving you medicine to help with this.

First, it is important to be sure you are not constipated, especially if you only have diarrhoea occasionally, and bowel movements are not regular. Sometimes, liquid poo can leak round the edges of hard poo that has become stuck in the colon. This is called “overflow diarrhoea”.

If you have been diagnosed with a condition such as inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn’s, diverticulosis etc. and your bowel symptoms have been worsening, it may be worth asking for a review with the doctor who manages your condition.

If you have been diagnosed with IBS-D (diarrhoea predominant irritable bowel syndrome) or a similar functional bowel disorder, there are some things that you may want to try to see if it reduces your diarrhoea.

Try these tips:

- Try cutting down on (or cutting out) dairy products
- Cut down on fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds, and wholegrains
- Switch to decaffeinated coffee and tea; caffeine stimulates bowel movements
- Have a look at the low FODMAP diet. High FODMAP foods are those which break down in your tummy. They can cause bloating, wind (farting) and diarrhoea. Some people find that cutting down on or cutting out high FODMAP foods helps their symptoms. Discuss with your healthcare provider if you think this applies to you/
- Make sure you are drinking plenty, especially if you are having a lot of diarrhoea. It is important not to become dehydrated.

If these tips do not help, be sure to tell your doctor. There may be other medications they can give you which might help with your symptoms.

Further information

You can find further information at:

- Bladder and Bowel UK [Bladder & Bowel UK home page - Bladder & Bowel UK \(bbuk.org.uk\)](https://bbuk.org.uk)
- The POGP [Patient Information | POGP \(thepogp.co.uk\)](https://thepogp.co.uk)

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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