

The following tips may be very helpful if you:

- struggle to empty your bowels
- need to strain or take laxatives to go
- or feel as if you haven't emptied your bowels completely afterwards

Be aware though, that it could take a few days before you notice any positive effects.

It is essential to try to address unhealthy bowel habits as straining to go could weaken your pelvic floor muscles and cause, or worsen, a pelvic organ prolapse. Constipation can put extra pressure on your bladder and has also been linked to back pain.

Try the following tips:

- Drink a shot glass size of prune juice (preferably with pulp) or eat a whole pear before bed
- Have a hot drink first thing in the morning (sometimes the caffeine in a cup of coffee or tea can stimulate the bowels)
- Follow this with a few minutes of abdominal self-massage, while taking slow deep breaths. One way of doing this is to move your hand slowly around your tummy in a clock-wise direction, in increasingly large circles
- Or try the 'I LOVE YOU' self-massage technique, as demonstrated in the following YouTube video [#19 The I love you massage - YouTube](#)
- After this bringing your knees to your chest and hold for 2-3 breaths can be helpful.
- Have golden linseeds (also known as flaxseeds), with your breakfast. Start with a teaspoon, you can build up to a tablespoon each day. Soak them in water overnight and mix with yoghurt, or with porridge before cooking
- 20 to 30 minutes after eating breakfast or after a warm morning drink can be a good time to empty your bowels, due to the colorectal reflex. This reflex causes the lower bowel to contract in waves, moving stool into the rectum, when food or fluid enters the stomach

Gradually increase the soluble fibre in your diet. The recommended amount is around 30g each day. The BDA Fibre food fact sheet contains advice on how to increase fibre in your diet: [Fibre | British Dietetic Association \(BDA\)](#)

Eating red meat, fried foods and processed foods can all contribute to constipation in some people.

Foods high in magnesium can be helpful, such as dark leafy vegetables, nuts and seeds, or you could ask a pharmacist about taking magnesium citrate as a supplement (though not if you have kidney disease).

Make sure that you are drinking enough fluids: 1.5 to 2 litres (about 3 to 4 pints) per day is recommended.

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Regular exercise can help – you could try building up to doing 30 minutes of brisk walking 5 times per week.

Stress can make constipation worse so finding ways to manage stress better, such as mindfulness, can help.

When you get the urge to empty your bowels, don't ignore it!

Adapting the position you use to sit on the toilet can help the rectum and anus 'straighten out', this can make it easier to empty your bowels without straining.

The following 'You Tube' videos demonstrate this:

- [How to open your bowels without straining](#) - Michelle Kenway
- [How to avoid straining when going to the toilet](#) - my SA Adelaide Physiotherapist

If the stool doesn't come out easily, you can try using sounds, or your breath, to help avoid straining. See what works best for you:

- Growling, hissing like an angry snake, or mooing like an angry cow!
- Pretending you are blowing hard through a straw
- Making an angry 'shush' noise as if making someone quiet
- Blow into your closed fist

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg