

**TIPS TO ENCOURAGE HEALTHY
BOWEL HABITS**

Physiotherapy Service

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

The following tips may be very helpful. 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 'routine':

- 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 10 to 20 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
- Have 1 tablespoon of golden linseeds (also known as flaxseeds), soaked overnight in water, with your breakfast – on their own or mixed in 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 in to the rectum, when food or fluid enters the stomach

Use the separate leaflet provided to check how much fibre you are eating on a daily basis (other foods not listed can be looked up on the internet, and the packaging of any processed food should indicate how much fibre it contains).

Making vegetable soups and freezing individual portions can be a useful way to increase the fibre content of your diet.

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).

Drink 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', which makes it easier to pass a stool (see the separate leaflet for information about the best position to use).

The following 'You Tube' videos may also be useful:

- [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 a sound to help to avoid straining. You could try the following suggestions and see what works best for you:

- Growling!
- Hissing like an angry snake!
- Mooing like an angry cow!
- Pretending you are blowing hard through a straw
- Making an angry 'shush' noise as if making someone quiet

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