

Constipation (Advice for urology patients)

Information for Patients

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What is constipation?

Constipation refers to how easily stool (poo) passes out of your body and how often. Passing a stool is often called a bowel movement. If it does not happen very often or if your bowel movements become less regular or are hard to pass, you may be constipated.

What is normal?

How often people pass stool differs from one individual to another. Most people will have a bowel movement between three times a day to three times a week. A normal bowel motion should be well formed, soft and easy to pass.

Constipation is common and can affect people of all ages. You can usually treat it at home with simple changes to your diet and lifestyle.

How do I know if I am constipated?

It is likely to be constipation if :

- You haven't had a poo at least 3 times in a week.
- The poo is often difficult to push out and larger than usual.
- The poo is often dry, hard or lumpy.
- You may also have a stomach ache and feel bloated or sick.
- Your bowel movements become less frequent than is usual for you.



What causes constipation?

Constipation in adults has many possible causes. Sometimes there is no obvious reason.

The most common causes include:

- Not eating enough fibre such as fruit, vegetables or cereals.
- Not drinking enough fluids.
- Not exercising or being less active.
- Ignoring the urge to go to the toilet.
- Changing your diet or daily routine.
- Stress, anxiety or depression.
- A side effect of medication such as painkillers that contain codeine, antidepressants, diuretics and iron supplements.
- Medical conditions including diabetes, Parkinsons, hypothyroidism and IBS.

How to treat constipation yourself.

Simple changes to your diet and lifestyle can help treat constipation.

Make changes to your diet.

To make your poo softer and easier to pass:

- Drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and caffeine. (1.5 ltr-2ltr daily is recommended.)
- Increase the fibre in your diet. (30g of fibre is recommended daily for adults, the best way to achieve this is by eating a healthy balanced diet containing your 5 a day of fruit and vegetables and choosing wholegrain foods such as wholemeal bread and brown rice)

- Add some wheat bran, oats or milled flaxseed (linseed) to your diet. This may take several weeks before you see the benefits. Increase fibre in your diet gradually to minimize flatulence and bloating. (A high fibre diet requires an adequate fluid intake)

Increase your activity.

- A daily walk or run can help you to poo more regularly.

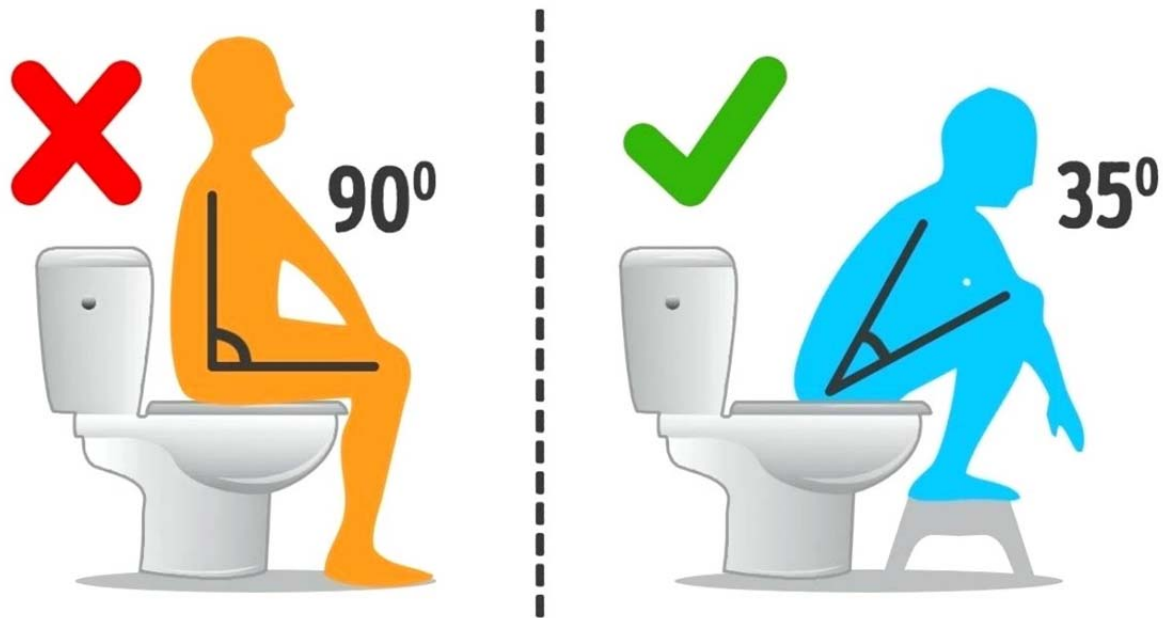
Improve your toilet routine.

- Keep to a regular time and place and give yourself plenty of time to use the toilet.
- Don't delay if you feel the urge to poo.
- To make it easier to poo, try resting your feet on a low stool while going to the toilet. If possible, raise your knees above your hips. (see "correct positioning" diagrams overleaf.)

A pharmacist can help with constipation.

Speak to a pharmacist if diet and lifestyle changes aren't helping. They can suggest a suitable laxative. These are medicines that help you poo more regularly. Most laxatives work within three days. They should only be used for a short time. A pharmacist can also advise you on natural remedies to try.

Complications of long term constipation can include haemorrhoids which may cause rectal bleeding; faecal impaction which can cause diarrhoea; weakening of the pelvic floor muscles which may cause incontinence; bladder over activity which may cause you to frequently or urgently need to urinate/ wee; urinary tract infections and urinary retention.



Correct positioning.

- Firstly make sure you are comfortable on the toilet. It is most natural for humans to squat to poo but modern toilets do not allow this. You may find that having your feet on a footstool about 8-10 inches high helps by improving the angle of the rectum within the pelvis, making it easier to poo. Keep your feet 1.5-2 feet apart
- Relax and breathe normally. Do not hold your breath as this will encourage you to strain.
- Bulge your tummy muscles forward as you take a deep breath in and then “brace” your tummy to prevent it from bulging further forwards, do not tighten your tummy.
- Concentrate on relaxing the anus (back passage) to allow the stool to pass. Use your deep breath to increase the pressure in your abdomen and push down towards your anus. Do not push from above without relaxing the anus below.

Only try this for a maximum of three times. If it does not work, get up from the toilet and walk around. It may help to try having a warm/hot drink.



Who can I contact for help or more information.

If you have any concerns or need further advice please contact the urology department at the Royal United Hospital, Bath.

During office hours **Monday to Friday 9am-5pm:-**

Alternatively, please ring the urology nurses based in the out-patients department:-

- Via Urology Reception **01225 825990**
- Urology Nurse Specialists **01225 824034**

Please note the nurses' numbers have an answerphone as they may be in clinic but all answerphones are checked regularly and messages responded to.

During **out of office hours** please contact your GP Surgery for their twilight and out of hours service. Or call the RUH urgent surgical on call out-of-hours service on **07909 532251**.

Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust
Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG
01225 428331 www.ruh.nhs.uk

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email ruh-tr.PatientAdviceandLiaisonService@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656.