

Constipation



**Finding it hard to poo:
things you can do to help yourself.**

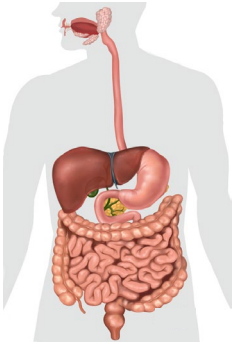


**Dorset
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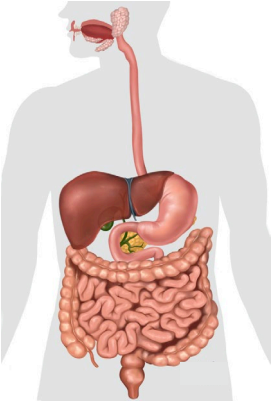
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Constipation



The food you eat is supposed to move easily through your body.

You should poo most days.
It should not be difficult to poo.



Constipation happens when poo is too hard and blocks up inside you.

It is not a nice feeling.
It can hurt and make you feel unwell.



This booklet is about things you can do to stop constipation.



Things to remember:

- you might need to change what you eat and drink, and do more exercise



- you can ask someone to help you to read this booklet and make changes in your life



- sometimes people get constipation even if they eat well, drink water and exercise



- you may still need help from a doctor, even if you try all the things in this booklet

What constipation feels like



Put a tick next to anything you have noticed about yourself:

I poo less often than normal.

I have to push hard to get poo out.

It hurts when I poo.

My poo is dry, hard, or watery.

My tummy hurts or is bigger than normal.

I sometimes feel sick.

Something else _____

If you ticked any boxes, see your GP.

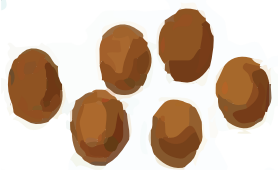
Look at your poo!



You can tell if you are constipated by looking at your poo.



You are probably constipated if your poo looks like this:



Separate, hard lumps, like nuts.



Sausage shaped, lumpy.



Healthy poo looks like this:



Sausage with cracks on the surface.



A smooth sausage.



You might be constipated if you have soft or watery poo:



Soft blobs: you can see the edges.



Mushy pieces, very soft.



Watery liquid.

What causes constipation?



Not eating enough fibre.

Fibre is in plants, like fruits and vegetables.



Not drinking enough water.

Water helps you to digest food.



Not moving enough.

Movement and exercise helps food to go through your body more easily.



Trying to stop yourself going for a poo when you need to.

This can make your poo get blocked up.



Some medicines.

Medicines from your pharmacist or doctor can cause constipation.



Feeling stressed, anxious or depressed.

Your feelings can affect your digestion!

Eat more fibre

There is fibre in plants. Fruit and vegetables come from plants.



Fibre helps your food to move through your **gut**. Your **gut** is a tube inside your body, between your mouth and your bottom.



To get more fibre, you need to eat:

- fruit
- vegetables
- wholegrain cereals



Fruit and vegetables make great snacks! Try carrot sticks and grapes instead of biscuits or chocolate.

Here are some foods that contain fibre. They are good for constipation:



Fruits

Apples, pears, oranges, apricots, grapes, raspberries, strawberries.



Vegetables

Carrots, broccoli, beans, peas, cabbage, cauliflower, spinach.



Wholegrain cereals

Bran flakes, brown pasta, oats, wholemeal bread, brown rice.



There is not much fibre in foods like white bread, white pasta and white rice. Choose wholegrain instead.

Drink more water



Your body needs water to work well.

If you do not drink enough, your body squeezes extra water from your food whilst it is in your gut.

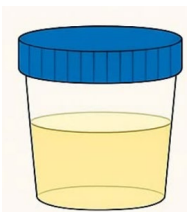


This makes your poo hard. It can get stuck. This is constipation.



Look at the colour of your wee:

- **Dark yellow:** drink more water



- **Pale yellow:** you are drinking enough



Water is the best thing to drink.
Have about 8 glasses every day.



If you don't like water, try:

- fruit or herb tea
- squash
- fizzy water



Avoid drinking alcohol.
For example, wine or beer.

Get more exercise



Exercise helps poo to move through your body more easily.

Walking is a great exercise!
Try to walk every day if you can.



See your GP if exercise is painful.



If you need support to exercise, talk to a social worker or care manager.

More exercise ideas:



- wheeling
- swimming
- sports
- dancing



Plan when you will exercise each day, and where you will go.

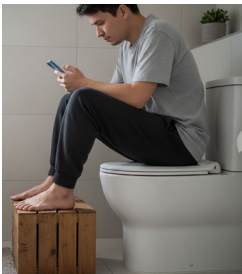


Try to do a bit more each week as you get fitter. You could aim to walk further, or swim for longer.

Using the toilet



Use the toilet as soon as you need to.
Don't try to hold your poo in.



Put your feet on a box.
Lean forward.
Try to relax.



Don't rush. Take as much time as you
need. Try not to push too hard.
This can cause more problems.



If you cannot poo, try again later.



When to see your GP

See your GP if the things in this booklet do not help, or:



- there is blood in your poo
- your stomach is swollen



- you have vomited poo
- you have lost weight without trying



- you are taking medicines that might be causing the problem
- you notice changes in how you poo



- you are in pain
- you have been constipated for a long time, and now have diarrhoea (watery poo)

Medicines



You must take the medicines your doctor gives you for constipation.

Some constipation medicines:



- Fybogel
- Movicol
- Dulcolax
- Senokot
- Lactulose



If your poo is runny and you haven't done a normal poo for 3 days, this may be constipation, not diarrhoea.



Do not stop taking your medicine if this happens.

Changing your habits



It can be hard to change how we eat and the things we do every day.

Here are some things that may help:



1. Get help

Tell people about the changes you want to make and ask for support.



2. Plan

Plan your meals, snacks and exercise.



3. Start small

A little more fibre and a little more exercise every day is better than big sudden changes.

Carers and professionals



It is easy to miss the signs of constipation in an older person, someone with dementia or a learning disability.



Look for changes in behaviour. For example, the person becoming irritable or confused. This might mean they are in pain.



You might see diarrhoea on their underwear or bed sheets.



Take the person to the GP as soon as possible. Tell the GP about all the changes you have noticed.

LEDER and constipation



LEDER means **Learning from Lives and Deaths Review**.

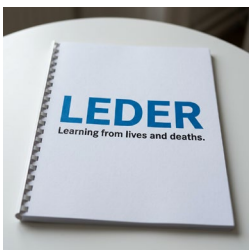


The NHS in England collects information when someone with a learning disability or autism dies.



This helps people to learn about:

- why the person died
- the care they got before they died



Information about all the deaths is put together in **LEDER** reports every year.



The reports tell us:

Some people die because they are constipated.



Some people would not have died if they had been getting better care.



Around **half** of all people with learning disabilities or autism get constipation.



People with learning disabilities often do not know when they are constipated. They may not be able to tell people about their symptoms.



This means they don't get treatment until it is an emergency.



Many carers, families, and health professionals don't know how serious constipation can be for people with learning disabilities.

People with learning disabilities are more likely to:



- have a poor diet
- not get enough exercise
- take medicines that cause constipation



We want this booklet to help with these things, so that fewer people suffer from constipation in the future.



In memory of Estelle O'Hanlon

Thanks to:

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