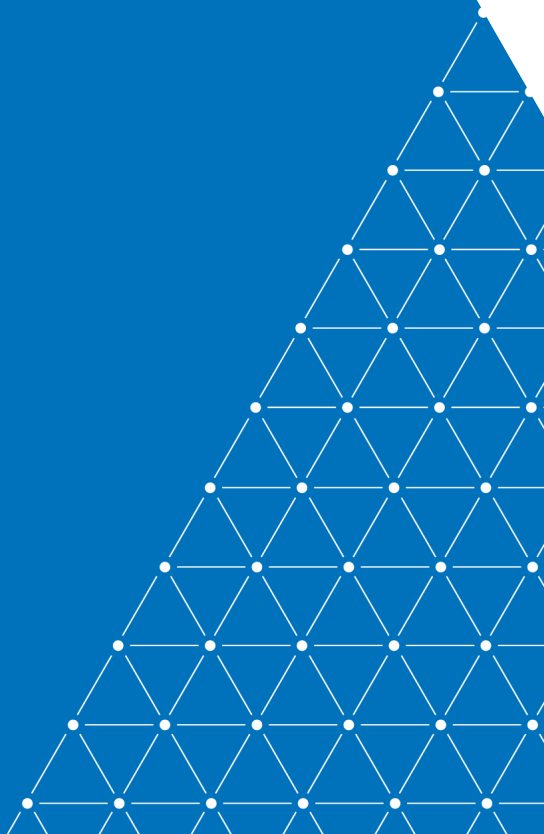
NHS
University Hospitals Sussex
NHS Foundation Trust

Constipation

Department of Dietetics



Patient information

What is this information about?

This information is about constipation. It explains:

- What constipation is.
- What the symptoms of constipation are.
- How you may be able to avoid getting constipation, or ease your constipation, by eating, drinking, and going to the toilet differently.

Why have I been given this information?

You have been given this leaflet because you have constipation. Following the advice in this leaflet can help you to avoid painful and uncomfortable symptoms of constipation.

The advice in this information on what to eat to avoid constipation is suitable for anyone over the age of five years.

What is constipation?

Constipation is when you poo (have bowel movements) less often than usual (less than three times a week) and when your poos (stools) are hard and dry. About 16 out of every hundred adults have symptoms of constipation. About 30 out of every hundred adults who are over 60 have symptoms of constipation.

What symptoms make it likely that I have got constipation?

You are likely to have constipation if:

- You have not had a poo at least 3 times during the last week or you are pooing less often than usual.
- The poo is unusually large or small and is dry, hard or lumpy.
- You are straining or in pain when you have a poo.
- You feel like you have not fully emptied your bowels.

You may also have a stomach ache and feel bloated or sick.

What are the most common causes of constipation?

The most common causes of constipation are:

- Not eating enough fibre.
- Not drinking enough fluid.
- Not exercising or being less active.
- Often ignoring the urge to go to the toilet.
- Stress, anxiety or depression.
- Side effects of medicines.

How can eating more fibre help my constipation?

The fibre in your food (dietary fibre) helps your digestive system to work properly. It is the part of the plants that we eat that we do not digest. It comes out of your body in your poo and adds weight and bulk to it. This makes it easier for you to poo and can support the need for straining to poo.

There are different types of dietary fibre. For adults, a healthy diet should usually include a variety of foods that have fibre in them.

Eating more fibre and wholegrain foods in the diet also helps protect against the chance that you will get heart disease or have a stroke.

Be aware

Do not eat foods that a healthcare professional has advised you to avoid for medical reasons.

Which foods have dietary fibre in them and can keep my bowels healthy and help me to avoid constipation?

Foods which have the type of fibre that can keep your bowels healthy and help you to avoid constipation in them include:

- Wholemeal and granary bread, rye bread.
- Wheat and bran breakfast cereals.
- Brown rice and pastas.
- Whole wheat crackers and crispbreads.
- Oats.
- Beans, peas, and lentils.
- Fruit and vegetables.

How should I increase the amount of fibre that I eat?

Slowly increase the amount of food with lots of fibre in it that you eat. This is so you do not have too much flatulence (you fart a lot) or feel too bloated.

You may be less constipated in a few days or it may take as long as four weeks.

What ideas can I try which can help me to eat more fibre and avoid constipation?

Do try:

- Wholemeal and granary breads instead of white bread.
- Brown rice and wholemeal pasta rather than white types.
- Wholegrain and high fibre breakfast cereals. For example, porridge, shredded wheat, and bran flakes. Add a handful of dried fruit to your cereal for even more fibre.
- Having high fibre snacks such as:
  - fruit
  - vegetable sticks with hummus
  - oat based snacks such as oatcakes, cereal bars or flapjack.
- Having a wholemeal sandwich with a filling that includes salad or a side salad.
- Having homemade vegetable soup with granary bread for a meal.
- Eating five portions of fruit and vegetable each day. These can be fresh, frozen or tinned.
  - kiwis with the skin (x2-3 a day)
  - apples, apricots, gooseberries, peaches, plums and prunes are very good to have
  - have fruit for pudding. For example, stewed fruit with ice cream or custard, fruit crumbles, fresh fruit and yoghurt.
  - add extra vegetables to sauces such as bolognaise, curry or chilli.
- Eating more beans peas and lentils.
  - you can buy them ready to eat in tins or pouches from supermarkets. Add them to meals such as soups, stews and shepherd's pie.
  - baked beans on toast are good for lunch.

Can including linseeds in my diet help if I have constipation?

Linseeds may help if you have constipation.

- Start with one teaspoon to one tablespoon each day and aim to build to a maximum of two tablespoons each day (2 tablespoons of linseeds = 24g).
- Take linseeds with a drink. Try around 150mls of fluid for each tablespoon of linseeds. Try to avoid leaving the drink for too long after as the linseed may no longer be liquified and harder to consume.
- Try adding linseeds to other food. For example, yoghurt, breakfast cereal, soup, and salad.
- It does not matter if the linseeds are golden or brown, whole, or ground. If you have diverticular disease you may wish to choose ground linseeds.
- It can take up to six months to get the full benefit from taking linseeds.

Is there any other plant fibre that would help me if I have constipation?

Yes, Psyllium has recently been linked to supporting constipation.

- Use the same serving methods as Linseed for a variety of ways to introduce psyllium into your diet.

Can drinking plenty help me to avoid constipation?

Yes. It is important to drink plenty of fluids when you are having more fibre in your diet. Not drinking enough fluids can cause constipation even if you are getting enough fibre.

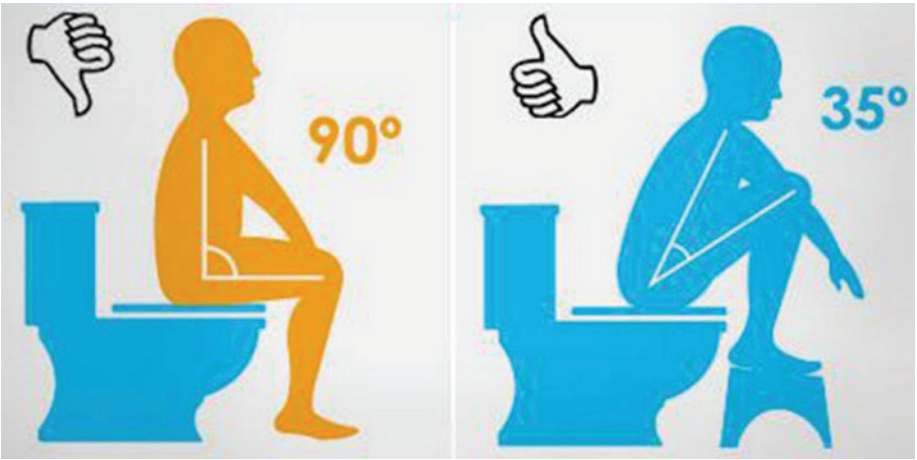
Aim to have 8 to 10 cups of fluid (without caffeine in it) a day.

Speak to your GP if the food first approach has not worked and you need to consider taking a laxative.

Can changing the way in which I go to the toilet help with my constipation?

Yes. Give yourself plenty of time to go to the toilet. Go to the toilet as soon as you can when you feel you need a poo. Waiting to have a poo can make your poo hard and pooing difficult.

To make it easier to poo try resting your feet on a low stool. Try to rest your knees above your hips as shown in the diagram below:



Who can I contact if I need further information after I have read this information?

For further information or to provide feedback please contact:

St. Richard's Hospital Dietitians:

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