

Information for patients and carers

**Simple measures to prevent
and manage constipation in
pain management**

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of three overlapping, wavy bands of blue color, transitioning from a lighter blue at the top to a darker blue at the bottom.

Who is this advice for?

Constipation can affect people of all ages but some patients with persistent pain may be at higher risk of this due to lifestyle factors and pain medications. This leaflet contains general hints and tips on managing this condition which are applicable to everyone and may be beneficial to people in higher risk groups.

Please note if you have a bowel condition or are Being treated for cancer this advice may not be suitable to you. If so, please discuss your condition with your medical team.

NICE advice on managing constipation generally, and in high-risk groups.

What is normal?

Constipation is a condition which makes it difficult to empty your bowels as often you should. There is a common belief that you need to open your bowels every day, but this is not the case. People vary a lot and opening the bowels can vary between three times a day to three times a week.

Constipation is defined as:

- You have not had a poo at least 3 times during the last week
- The poo is often large and dry, hard, or lumpy
- You are straining or in pain when you have a poo
- You may also have a stomach-ache and feel bloated or sick

Constipation is common and it affects people of all ages it may be caused by a variety of factors including:

- Dehydration
- Eating a diet low in fibre
- Having an irregular meal pattern
- Being less active
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- Medications including pain relief medication such as Opioids such as morphine-based medicine

Constipation can cause a reduced appetite and abdominal discomfort. You can often treat it with simple changes to your diet and lifestyle. If you have a diagnosed bowel condition, please speak to your medical team about any changes to your diet.

General hints and tips

- Constipation can be caused or made worse by poor bowel habits
- The most effective time to empty your bowel is when you first get the urge to go
- First thing in the morning or following a meal are common times to get this urge
- Do not strain to empty the bowel, as this pushes down on the muscles supporting your pelvic area, preventing the bowel from emptying effectively
- Straining also pushes out haemorrhoids (piles)
- Opening your bowels should take no more than two or three minutes and the poo consistency should be semisolid, like toothpaste

What you eat can help or make constipation worse. Changing your diet should be the first way to try and improve constipation

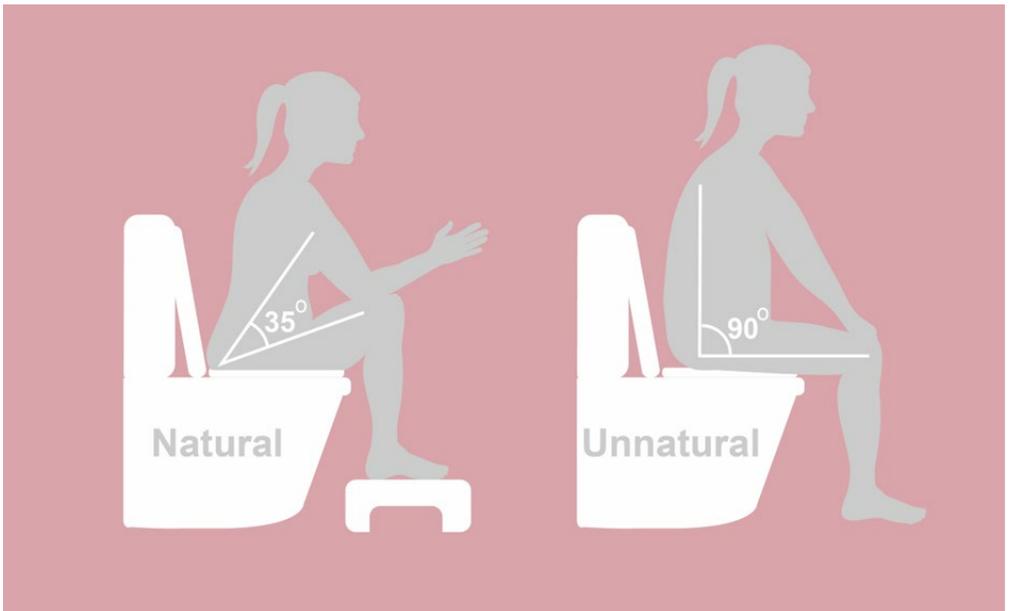
To make your poo softer and easier to pass:

- Drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol (Avoid sugary drinks)

- Increase the fibre in your diet
- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, these are rich in fibre
- Add some wheat bran, oats or linseed to your diet
- Improve your toilet routine, keep to a regular time and place and give yourself plenty of time to use the toilet
- Consider increasing your activity, a daily walk or run can help you poo more regularly
- Do not delay if you feel the urge to poo

Seating Position

Research shows a squatting position can help, try resting your feet on a low stool while going to the toilet. If possible, raise your knees above your hips.



How to sit in a better position on the toilet.

1. Abdominal bracing (making your waist wide).
2. Relax and bulge the tummy muscles.
3. Let go – without straining, relax and widen the back passage. Do NOT hold your breath.
4. Finish – draw up the back passage firmly.

If the simple measures described do not help and your symptoms persist, then you will need to consult your GP or your Pain specialist.

A sudden slowing up of your bowel, especially if you are aged over 40, should also be reported.

Try not to take laxatives before seeing your doctor. If you also experience any of the following symptoms, you should see your GP immediately:

- Unexplained weight loss
- Bleeding in the stool
www.nhs.uk/conditions/bleeding-from-the-bottom-rectal-bleeding
- Abdominal or rectal pain

Other treatments

Laxatives are a group of medicines used to treat constipation. They can be taken by mouth as liquids, tablets, capsules, or powder dissolved in water. Treatment with a laxative is needed only if the measures above (fibre, fluid, etc) do not work well. Laxatives should only be used for a few days, or your bowel becomes use to them, and they are then less effective.

Please speak to a pharmacist or doctor for advice. If you have a diagnosed bowel condition, please speak to your medical team about any changes to your diet.

Laxatives explained:

Bulk-forming laxatives: (Sometimes called fibre supplements). These increase the 'bulk' of your faeces similar to fibre. They take a few days to work you must drink plenty of water with these, initially they can increase wind and cause bloating. They may not help severe constipation. They are not suitable for constipation caused by opioids.

Stimulant laxatives. These stimulate the nerves in the large bowel. This makes the muscle in the wall of the large bowel squeeze harder than usual. These work within 6-8 hours, a night-time dose is usually recommended. They aren't recommended for long term use. These are suitable for opioid related constipation.

Osmotic laxatives. These work by retaining fluid in the large bowel so less fluid is absorbed into the bloodstream from the large bowel, they can take two days to have any effect, so it is not suitable for the rapid relief of constipation. Possible side-effects include abdominal pain and bloating. These are suitable for opioid related constipation. For the person who has opioid-induced constipation:

NICE guidance for managing pain medication related constipation

- Do not use bulk-forming laxatives
- Do try an osmotic laxative and a stimulant
- Gradually change the laxative dose(s) up or down and aim to produce soft, formed stool without straining at least three times per week

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact Pain Management Team via pain.management@lthtr.nhs.uk

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYcv6odWfTM&t=14s

www.nhs.uk/conditions/constipation/

<https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/constipation/management/adults/>

<https://bnf.nice.org.uk/treatment-summaries/constipation/>

<https://patient.info/digestive-health/constipation/laxatives#SnippetTab>

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This information can be made available in large print, audio, Braille and in other languages.**

Department: Integrated Pain management

Division: DCS

Production date: November 2023

Review date: November 2026

JR 1054 v1