

Promoting Bowel Health



Patient Information

What is a normal bowel habit?

A normal bowel habit is having your bowels opened from a minimum of three times a week up to a maximum of three times per day, remembering that bowel habits can vary from person to person. Changes to your normal routine can affect your bowel habit, such as dietary, environment and emotions. If there is an unexplained change to your normal bowel habit you should inform a health professional.

A normal stool should be formed 'not too hard and not too soft' and should be easily passed without the need for straining. Normal stool colour is brown; if you notice black stool, pale stool or blood in your stool you should inform a health professional.

Bowel Problems

Although there are a number of bowel conditions the most common complaints are constipation, loose stool and irritable bowel syndrome.

Constipation

Constipation is defined as having your bowels open less than three times a week, with hard, small stool and needing to strain, often with pain and discomfort. Prolonged straining can damage your pelvic floor muscle. Factors that relate to this include: poor fibre and fluid intake, lack of exercise, ignoring 'the call to stool', stress, illness and medication.

Loose stool

Loose stool is often defined as having loose, watery stools often with urgency and frequency. Factors that relate to this include: illness, medication, inadequate diet and stress.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable bowel syndrome is defined as having an upset in your bowel habit, often fluctuating between loose stool and constipation, accompanied by stomach pain and bloating. Factors that relate to this include: food intolerances, stress and anxiety.

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Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust
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Fluids

Fluid intake is very important in maintaining a healthy bowel. An appropriate fluid intake is 8 glasses (2-2.5 litres) per day. Remember that when undertaking exercise, or in hot weather or when unwell this may need to be increased slightly.

The types of fluids that you drink can affect your bowel. Consider gradually reducing caffeine intake and avoid alcohol and fizzy drinks.

Diet

A well balanced diet is essential to maintain a good bowel routine and reduce the possibility of developing bowel disease in the future. Individuals need a balance of fruit and vegetables (soluble fibre), aim for five portions a day, and wholegrain foods such as cereals, brown bread and pulses (insoluble fibre).

Golden Linseed is a seed of the flax plant which has both soluble and insoluble fibre in it. It is also rich in Omega 3. This seed sprinkled over food such as cereal, soups and salads can be beneficial in regulating bowel habit if taken daily. It should be sprinkled in quantities of 1-2 tablespoons. Drink a glass of fluid when you take Golden Linseed.

It is known that large amounts of processed food and fast food can have an effect on your daily bowel habit. It is also known to contribute to bowel disease. Some people can be intolerant to certain foods and some of these can have a direct effect on the bowel, for example, wheat gluten, lactose and artificial sweeteners.

Routine

Bowels like routine and regular meals. In particular starting the day with breakfast can help to stimulate the bowel. It is important to respond to the 'call to stool', as if it is ignored on a regular basis it can lead to constipation and long term bowel problems. Sitting on the toilet routinely, particularly after meals, can encourage your bowel to open.



You should allow time whilst sitting in the correct position to encourage bowels to open and empty fully. The correct position is to have your knees higher than your hips and your feet on a firm surface (you may need a foot stool to achieve this) – see picture.

To avoid straining, the 'Brace technique' can be used.

This method uses the abdominal muscles to encourage a bowel movement without straining:

- Sit in the correct toileting position with feet elevated on a stool

- Brace (tense) your abdominal muscles
- Bear down into your rectum
- Breath out slowly
- This can be repeated several times

Lifestyle

Regular exercise is beneficial for your general health and bowel health. Physical activity can stimulate the bowel. Practising pelvic floor exercises will strengthen your muscles giving you more control of your bowel.

Smoking damages collagen in the muscles and therefore causes poor muscle tone. It is also known that smoking is linked to cancer of the bowel.

If any regular medication you may be taking is affecting your bowel habit, discuss these concerns with your GP. If you are using over the counter medication for your bowels, it is advisable to discuss this with your health care professional.

Contact us:

Wiltshire Continence Service Central Health Clinic Avon Approach Castle Street Salisbury SP1 3SL Telephone: 01722 323196	Wiltshire Continence Service Trowbridge Community Hospital Adcroft Street Trowbridge BA14 8PH Telephone: 01225 711323
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Safeguarding

Wiltshire Health and Care (WHC) are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk of abuse, including victims and survivors of domestic abuse. We expect all WHC staff to share this commitment and promote safeguarding by implementing WHC policies and procedures, act promptly on concerns and share information appropriately.

If you or your carer have any concerns regarding a child or adult's safety, please phone Wiltshire Safeguarding Team on 0300 456 0111 (Adult) or 0300 456 0108 (Child) (9am – 5pm Monday - Friday) or please call 999 if you feel they are in immediate danger.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any questions, or concerns, suggestions or compliments about our service, please speak to a member of staff.

This information sheet is available in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 0300 123 7797 and whc.pals@nhs.net

Patient and Public Involvement

We value your opinions which will help us to further develop our services.

If you wish to provide feedback or get involved in our patient participation groups, please email the Patient and Public Involvement Officer at ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net or telephone 01249 454386.