



## Your important health information

# Healthy bowel habits

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### What is normal bowel function?

- Everyone's bowel habits are different. Opening your bowels three times a day to three times a week is considered normal. This may vary with age, diet, lifestyle, pregnancy and specific medical conditions or medications that affect the digestive system.
- The frequency and consistency of your bowel actions should be consistent for you. If this changes, it is important to speak to your health care provider.
- If the bowel is working optimally, you should experience a desire to go to the toilet when the bowel is full, be able to make it to the toilet without rushing or having an accident, and stools should be well formed and easy to pass without straining. Your bowels should empty completely and require little wiping.

### What is constipation?

- Symptoms of constipation may include dry, hard stools which are difficult to pass, pushing or straining to empty your bowels or a feeling of not emptying properly.
- Constipation can strain your pelvic floor muscles which are the muscles that maintain control of your bladder and bowel, and support your pelvic organs.
- By practising healthy bowel habits and preventing constipation you will help to protect the pelvic floor from repetitive strain. This repetitive strain can cause weakness and damage to these muscles and the support structures of your pelvic organs.

### What can you do to keep your bowel healthy?

- **Drink well:**
  - For adults **two** litres of fluid everyday is encouraged, mostly water.
  - Be aware that the recommended fluid intake may vary with weather, exercise and other health conditions.
- **Eat plenty of fibre:**
  - Having the right amount of dietary fibre encourages a soft and well formed stool.
  - Fibre from a variety of food sources is best including fruits, vegetables, seeds, nuts and whole grains.
  - Some people benefit from fibre supplements or laxatives. Discuss this with your health professional.
- **Exercise regularly** to keep your bowels moving. Walking is a great way to get your body moving as well as your bowels!

- **Do pelvic floor exercises.** Strong pelvic floor muscles support your bowel, as well as your bladder and uterus. Ask your physio how to get started.
- **Practise good toileting habits:**
  - Only go to the toilet when the urge to open your bowels is strong (this is often best 30 - 45 minutes after a meal).
  - Do not hover over the toilet seat. Adopt a good position (see below).
  - Do not strain to empty your bowels.
  - Always wipe from front to back.
  - If you sit on the toilet for greater than 10 minutes without result, walk away and try again later.
- **Adopt a good toileting position (see diagram):**
  - Place a footstool under your feet so that your knees are higher than your hips
  - Lean forward with a straight back
  - Rest your arms on your thighs
  - To empty, relax your lower stomach muscles (abdominals) and back passage (anus)
  - As you breathe out bulge your lower tummy out and widen your waist muscles. Imagine your anus is opening and letting go
  - After you have emptied your bowels, contract your pelvic floor muscles strongly several times



## Additional Information

### Further Information

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact:

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