

# Constipation



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## What is constipation?

It is a common condition that affects people of all ages. It is generally described as having fewer than three bowel movements a week. Or passing hard, big or pellet-like stools.

## Statistics

Reported prevalence rates of constipation in the UK vary widely between studies, with figures ranging from 4% to 20%



It's estimated that around **1 in every 7** adults is affected



## Common causes of constipation

- Not drinking enough fluid
- Not having enough fibre (fruits, vegetables, wholegrains & pulses)
- Side effect of some health conditions, e.g. underactive thyroid, irritable bowel syndrome
- Not eating regularly or a change in routine
- Pregnancy
- Medication or supplements – anti-depressants, anti-epileptics, antipsychotics, opiates, diuretics, calcium supplements and iron supplements
- Depression, anxiety, stress or trauma
- Laxative overuse
- Chewing problems loose dentures/ tooth problems
- Ignoring the sensation to go
- Lack of Physical activity
- Caffeine - causes dehydration
- Refined and processed foods





## Lifestyle changes for chronic constipation relief

### Exercise Simply getting up and moving can help constipation

A regular walking plan even 10 to 15 minutes several times a day can help the body and digestive system work at their best.



If you are already fit, you might choose aerobic exercise

e.g.

Running

Jogging



Or

Swing dancing

Swimming



Stretching and yoga



Drink enough fluids, especially water. Aim to have 1.5-2 litres (6-8 glasses) of fluids each day.



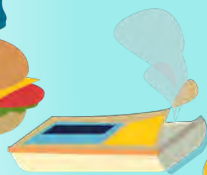
Avoid or limit refined and processed foods (e.g. white bread, white pasta, ready meals)



Keeping a food diary is a useful tool to monitor symptoms and foods that you eat



Check medication and supplements which may cause constipation, e.g. iron and calcium supplements, painkillers such as codeine (do not stop medication unless discussed with your doctor)



Avoid overuse of laxatives



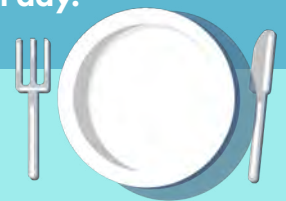
Reduce caffeine and alcohol



Have a regular bowel movement routine - morning or after meals. Don't ignore the urge to go, however, do not strain or pressure either



Mindful eating chew your food well, sit and relax during meals



Have regular meals

### Correct position

Optimising seating position on the toilet can have a dramatic impact. Try raising knees higher than hips with a small foot stool, resting elbows on thighs and leaning forward keeping your spine straight.





## Diet

Dietary fibre is a plant material that our bodies cannot digest, acting as a broom to sweep out the digestive tract



**Adding fibre-rich foods to the diet is key. A daily serving of 30-40g of fibre is necessary to promote the wave-like contractions that move food through the colon.**

**Increase fibre intake gradually to prevent discomfort, and remember to keep yourself well hydrated (fibre needs water!).**



**A whole food plant based diet is naturally high in fibre. Aim for a variety of fruits and vegetables and whole grains.**

**There are two kinds of fibre: soluble fibre, and insoluble fibre. The digestive tract requires both types of fibre. Most fruits and vegetables contain both types.**



### Soluble fibre

Soluble fibre soaks up water and improves the consistency of the stool by turning it into a gel-like substance.

**Foods high in soluble fibre include:**

Apples, pears, stoned fruits, guavas, carrots, peas, turnips, Brussel sprouts, broccoli, avocados, sweet potatoes, the flesh of fruits and vegetables, beans and other pulses, oats, ground flaxseeds, hazelnuts, sunflower seeds, barley.

### Insoluble fibre

Insoluble fibre adds bulk to the stool to prevent constipation.

**Foods high in insoluble fibre include:**

The skins and pips of fruits and vegetables, berries, dark green leafy vegetables, green beans, nuts and seeds, wholegrains (e.g. brown rice, whole wheat), quinoa, bran, wheat germ, buckwheat.



### Average fibre content :



A medium-sized bowl of porridge = 4g (with 80g berries = 2.5g)



1 tablespoon peanut butter = 1g



A small handful of nuts = around 2-3g



A medium pear = 5.5g



A slice of wholegrain bread = 3g



½ cup canned chickpeas = 5g



Baked beans (100g) = 3.5g



A medium apple = around 4g (only 2g without the skin !)



A medium banana = 3g



½ cup cooked quinoa = 2.5g



A medium baked sweet potato (with skin) = 4g



½ cup cooked broccoli = 2.5g



1 cup wholemeal cooked pasta = 4.5g



wholemeal spaghetti (150g) = 5g

## Diet cont.

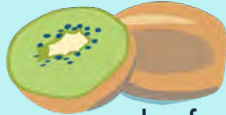


### Natural laxatives



#### Natural remedies

Such as figs, rhubarb, papaya, kiwifruits, stewed apples, prunes or prune juice have been found to improve symptoms in some patients. You can also sprinkle small amounts of bran on cereal or add to cooking and baking.



#### Try:

a kiwifruit, or 6 dried prunes per day for a week (or twice more if well tolerated).



#### OR

½ tablespoon of ground flaxseeds a day to start with (slowly increase to 2 tablespoons a day if well tolerated) – can be added to breakfast, soups or salads. Remember to keep yourself well hydrated.

### A few tips

- Frozen fruits and vegetables are convenient & contain the same amount of fibre as their fresh version
- Choose seeded wholegrain or wholemeal breads
- Sprinkle mixed seeds on your porridge or on your soup
- Add grated fresh fruits or chopped dried fruits to your breakfast
- Keep the skin on fruits and vegetables
- Try fermented vegetables (e.g. kimchi, sauerkraut)
- Add beans or lentils to salads



## Red flags

**Red flag signs suggesting an underlying cause, especially for those over the age of 50. It is important to consult your GP.**

- New symptom of constipation for more than 6 weeks
- Blood in stool
- Unintended weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Night sweats, fever, abdominal pain or vomiting
- Iron-deficiency anaemia
- Family history of colorectal cancer

### Further resources

[Nice.org.uk/topics/constipation-management](https://www.nice.org.uk/topics/constipation-management)

[BDA.uk.com/resource/fibre](https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/fibre)








[Nutrition.org.uk/healthy-living/basics/fibre](https://www.nutrition.org.uk/healthy-living/basics/fibre)

[GP online.com/constipation-adults-red-flag-symptoms/](https://www.gp-online.com/constipation-adults-red-flag-symptoms/)

[Eatingwell,natural-food-remedies-for-constipation](https://www.eatingwell.com/natural-food-remedies-for-constipation)



## Bristol Stool Chart

<b>Type 1</b>		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
<b>Type 2</b>		Sausage-shaped but lumpy
<b>Type 3</b>		Like a sausage but with cracks on the surface
<b>Type 4</b>		Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
<b>Type 5</b>		Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (passed easily)
<b>Type 6</b>		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
<b>Type 7</b>		Watery, no solid pieces ENTIRELY LIQUID

People can use the Bristol stool chart to check what their stools are: in general, we will be aiming for a consistency of type 3 or 4.