

Let's Talk...

Constipation



What is constipation and what causes it?

Constipation is a very common condition where you find it difficult to pass poo, or you are passing poo less often than what is normal for you. When you do go, your poo might be hard, dry, or lumpy and it can feel like you haven't fully emptied your bowels.

It can leave you feeling bloated, uncomfortable or sluggish. With taboo still surrounding our poo, we understand why you might feel hesitant to mention it, but we're here to flush away the stigma surrounding constipation. Why? Because our guts and what they do are a crucial part of our health. The more you know about constipation, the easier it can be to manage it and understand when it could be a sign of something more serious that needs medical attention.

Constipation is something most of us will experience at some point in our lives. It can happen for lots of different reasons, such as:

- Not eating enough fibre.
- Not drinking enough fluids.
- A change in your usual routine or diet.
- Stress or anxiety.
- A side effect of a medication you've taken.

Often, it lasts for a few days and clears up with some simple adjustments.



How should I treat constipation?

If you're experiencing short-term constipation, it can usually be managed at home with a few small changes to your everyday habits.

Fluids

Make sure you are drinking plenty of extra fluids, typically water. Staying well-hydrated helps to soften your poo, making it much easier to pass.

Food

Gradually increase the amount of fibre in your diet. Good choices include wholemeal bread, oats, fruits, vegetables, beans and lentils. Try to eat regular meals and don't skip breakfast, as eating in the morning helps to get your guts moving.

Movement

Keeping active can help get your guts moving too. Even a daily walk can encourage your guts into a more regular rhythm. Build movement into your daily routine, finding something that works for you and that you enjoy. If you can, try a short walk after you've eaten a meal.

Routine

Never ignore the urge to go to the toilet for a poo. When you do go, try using a small footstool to raise your knees above your hips. This puts your body in the ideal neutral position to pass poo more easily.

Medication

Laxatives are available over the counter from pharmacies. It's a good idea to speak to a pharmacist as they can recommend the right type for you to help get your gut back on track.



How can I avoid constipation?

One of the best ways to avoid constipation in the long run is by looking after your gut health every day. The best way to do this is by:

- Eating a varied, high-fibre diet.
- Drinking plenty of water throughout the day.
- Building regular exercise into your weekly routine.
- Establishing a toilet routine that isn't rushed. Listen to your body and give yourself the time and space to go.

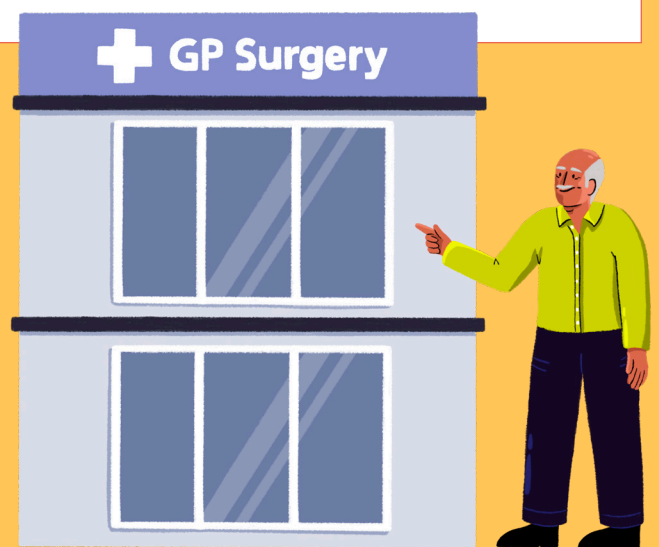
When should I seek medical advice?

If you've tried making lifestyle changes and your constipation hasn't improved after a couple of weeks, you should seek medical advice.

You should seek medical advice from your doctor or NHS 111 sooner if any of these apply:

- If you notice blood in your poo or bleeding from your bottom.
- If you have lost weight without meaning to.
- If you are experiencing severe, constant belly pain or cramping.
- If you feel constantly tired or dizzy.
- If you are experiencing alternating bouts of constipation and diarrhoea.

Constipation that lasts a long time is known as chronic constipation. You should always see your GP if your symptoms are persistent, as the underlying cause needs to be investigated. Constipation can be a symptom of many different digestive conditions, so it's important you get it checked out.



How do I tell someone I have constipation?

Telling your doctor

Your doctor is no stranger to talking about poo, so don't worry about talking to them about constipation. Be honest about how long you've experienced it, if you've had any other symptoms, and about the impact it's having on your daily life. It's important they have all the facts so that they can provide the right care and treatment.

Telling your employer

You might want to tell your employer if your constipation is causing you severe discomfort, bloating, or pain that is affecting your focus or physical comfort at work. If your constipation is a symptom of a digestive condition, you might want to share your diagnosis with your employer or let them know that you're undergoing tests with your doctor. They might be able to offer you support and adjustments.

Telling your family and friends

If you're experiencing constipation, whatever the reason, you can tell people about it. It might make you feel better to talk openly about your digestive health with loved ones, especially if you need support from them. It's very likely that they've experienced constipation themselves before and anyone who cares about you will meet you with kindness and reassurance.

How do I know what's normal for me?

Checking your poo regularly is important because it helps you to get to know your normal and spot when something isn't quite right. The number of times that we poo per week and the colour and consistency of our poo will be different for everyone but generally, your poo is an indicator of your health and you should look out for any changes.

For more information about constipation, including causes, diagnosis and support, go to gutscharity.org.uk/symptoms/constipation.

Our online Poo-Torial tool can help you to better understand your digestive health by looking at the colour, consistency and frequency of your poo. Go to gutscharity.org.uk/poo-torial to try it now.



Guts UK is the national charity for the digestive system. We provide information and support on more than 40 digestive conditions and symptoms, as well as health and lifestyle. Go to gutscharity.org.uk/information to find out more. Need support? Contact our Helpline on 0300 102 4887 or gutscharity.org.uk/helpline.

Please note, this information is intended for people without a diagnosed digestive condition. If you live with a digestive condition and need information and support for constipation, please speak to your healthcare team.

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