



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Understanding Your Bowels

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:
Bladder and Bowel Health Service

Clementhorpe Health Centre
Cherry Street, York YO23 1AP
Tel: 01904 721200

Understanding Your Bowels

- Bowels should be moved at least three times a week.
- This should not involve pain, discomfort or excessive straining.
- The bowel should feel empty following the bowel movement.
- The bowel movement should be soft and smooth, like a sausage.

If you are constipated

- You may feel unwell.
- Bad taste in the mouth.
- Bad Breath.
- Abdominal bloating.
- Decreased appetite.
- Tired and unable to concentrate.
- Bowel movements may be hard lumps – like nuts – difficult to pass.

Bad habits that can affect your bowels

- Irregular meals, too much processed food.
- Not enough fibre in the diet.
- Too little fluids to drink.
- Taking regular laxatives over years.
- Ignoring the sensation to move your bowels.
- Not allowing time to have bowels opened.
- Not sitting in the correct position.
- Many people have got into bad habits since childhood.

Remember

- Some tablets may cause constipation for example painkillers, iron, water tablets, anticholinergic medication.
- Going on holiday or into hospital can change your diet/routine and cause constipation.

Laxatives

- There are different types of laxatives which may help constipation.
- Stool softener/fibre supplement will help produce a softer bowel movement.
- Stimulants will help bowel movements.
- Some medications do both – soften and stimulate.

Always ask your Pharmacist, District Nurse or Doctor if you are unsure about your medication.

Rules to follow:

Fluids

Drink at least six to eight mugs of fluid every day.

Drinks should be water/fruit juice – some caffeine may be helpful with meals.

Exercise

Try to include 30 minutes exercise five times a week, i.e. walking, swimming.

Diet

Include five portions of fruit/vegetables and high fibre cereal foods in your diet.

Opportunity

Adopt a regular bowel routine, i.e. one hour after a meal. Do not ignore the sensation to have bowels moved.

Position

Ensure correct sitting position on the toilet. Knees higher than hips leaning forwards and put elbows on your knees. Allow sufficient time.

Further Information

If you experience any of the following bowel problems, please contact your Doctor.

- Changes to your normal bowel routine.
- If you observe any blood or mucus in the movement.
- Changes in your weight or appetite.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Bladder and Bowel Health Service, Clementhorpe Health Centre, Cherry Street, York YO23 1AP on Tel: 01904 721200.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

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