

# Constipation

Constipation is a common condition that affects people of all ages. It can mean that you are not passing stools (poo) regularly or are unable to completely empty your bowels.



Constipation can also cause your stools to be hard, lumpy, large or small. The severity of constipation varies from person to person. Many people only experience constipation for a short time but for others, constipation can be a long-term (chronic) condition that causes significant pain and discomfort and affects quality of life.

## Treating constipation at home

Some ways you can help treat your constipation are listed below.



- Increase your daily intake of fibre. You should eat at least 18-30g of fibre a day. High-fibre foods include fruit, vegetables and cereals

- Add some bulking agents, like wheat bran to your diet. These will help make your stools softer and easier to pass
- Avoid dehydration by drinking plenty of water
- Get more exercise by going for a daily walk or run
- If your constipation is causing pain or discomfort, you may want to take a painkiller like paracetamol. Make sure you always follow the dosage instructions carefully. Children under 16 years of age should not take aspirin
- Identify a routine of a place and time of day when you are comfortably able to spend time in the toilet. Respond to your bowel's natural pattern: when you feel the urge, do not delay.



For more information, help and support visit NHS Choices at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) or call **NHS Direct** on **0845 46 47**

**Choose the right care**

# What to do next...



## Choose care at home if...

- You have constipation occasionally
- Follow the self care instructions above and it will clear up



## Choose your Pharmacy or GP if...

- Contact your local pharmacy if you have followed the instructions above and still have some constipation after 3 days – they can help if you need some over-the-counter laxatives.
- Contact your GP if your constipation lasts for more than two weeks and over-the-counter treatments from your pharmacy have not helped
- Contact your GP if you are in pain or haven't been able to pass a stool for two or more days
- Contact your GP if you think that your constipation might be a sign of something more serious
- Contact your GP or GP out-of-hours service if you have a painful, swollen (distended) abdomen, vomiting and haven't passed any wind or stool for more than 12 hours.
- Contact your GP or GP out-of-hours service if your constipation seems to cause a painful lump in your groin



## Call 999 A&E if...

- There are no reasons why you should need to go to A&E for problems with constipation
- A&E is for urgent, life-threatening illness and injury



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