

Lifestyle advice

For regular bowel movements

This brochure provides information on a healthy lifestyle to promote regular bowel movements.

A healthy high-fibre diet

Dietary fibre is raw plant fibre found in the cell wall of plant products. Our body cannot digest this substance, but it is very important for the proper functioning of the bowels. Dietary fibre absorbs and retains water, making stools a bit firmer and more voluminous. Dietary fibre is found in plant products such as wholemeal bread, rye bread, fruit, vegetables, salad, potatoes and (brown) rice. The recommended amount of dietary fibre is about 30-40 grams per day.

List of high-fibre foods

Below is a list of high-fibre foods. If you are not used to eating high-fibre foods, you should gradually introduce them into your diet. Your intestines need to get used to these foods. You may experience bloating in the beginning.

Check www.vezeltest.info to see if you are eating enough fibre daily. If you are eating too little fibre, try more high-fibre foods. More information on high-fibre foods can be found at www.spijservertering.info.

Fibre content (grams)

1 slice of white bread	1 gram
1 slice of brown bread	2 grams
1 slice of wholemeal bread	2 grams
1 slice of light rye bread	2 grams
1 slice of dark rye bread	3 grams
1 wholemeal rusk	1 gram
1 slice of gingerbread	1 gram
1 crispbread	1 gram
1 high-fibre crispbread	2 grams
1 apple with or without skin	3 grams
1 serving of fruit, no citrus, average	4 grams
1 serving of citrus fruit, average	2 grams
1 bowl of soaked dried fruit	8 grams
1 small potato	2 grams
1 serving spoon of vegetables	1 gram

1 serving spoon of salad	1 gram
1 serving spoon of rice	1 gram
1 gram of brown rice	1 gram
1 tablespoon of brinta	1 gram
1 tablespoon of muesli	1 gram

Drink enough

The body needs fluids. The human body consists of over sixty per cent water. These fluids ensure that all body cells receive sufficient nutrients and that waste products are disposed of. Make sure you drink enough (one and a half to two litres of liquids spread throughout the day). That's twelve to sixteen cups or glasses. If you start consuming more dietary fibre than you were used to, you will need to drink a lot. Otherwise, the extra fibre can cause constipation instead.

Get enough exercise

Regular exercise stimulates bowel movement and can prevent constipation. Exercise keeps the bowels working.

Don't skip breakfast!

A high-fibre breakfast gets the bowel functioning started and keeps the bowels working.

Stop smoking

Smoking has a negative effect on the functioning of the bowels. Inflammation of the bowels is much more common in smokers. Quitting smoking is, therefore, important.

Laxatives

Laxatives are substances that improve bowel movements. However, besides the laxatives that may be prescribed by your doctor, there are also many natural remedies available to improve bowel movements. Often, these natural remedies contain herbs that stimulate the bowels, such as senna (pods). Examples include laxative tea and sometimes breakfast tea. Be careful with these. There is still considerable uncertainty about the effect of senna on the intestinal wall. For questions about laxatives, it is best to consult your doctor.

Toilet habits

When you feel an urge, go to the toilet. This is when stool passing is easiest. You often feel an urge after a meal. With a longer period of constipation, it is more difficult to feel the urge. Those who often suppress the urge won't feel it after a while.

Take your time and relax when you go to the toilet. But don't sit for too long. This, in turn, can cause other symptoms like haemorrhoids. If the stool does not come, you can try to encourage it by breathing in and out calmly and tilting your pelvis forwards and backwards several times. Breathe in while tilting forwards, and breathe out again when tilting backwards. If the stool still does not pass, you should leave the toilet and do a few minutes of intensive exercise, such as jumping, climbing stairs or walking. This may increase the urge, which may enable you to pass the stool. Always try to follow this advice, even when you find it difficult.

Good toilet posture when passing stools

Step one  foot rest Knees higher than hips	Step two  foot rest Lean forwards and put elbows on your knees
Step three  foot rest Bulge out your abdomen Straighten your spine	Correct position  foot rest Knees higher than hips Lean forwards and put elbows on your knees Bulge out your abdomen Straighten your spine

Reproduced by the kind permission of Ray Addison, Nurse Consultant in Bladder and Bowel Dysfunction.
Wendy Ness, Colorectal Nurse Specialist.

Produced as a service to the medical profession by Norgine Ltd.

MO/03/11 (6809792) November 2003

More information

For more information, call the Surgery outpatient clinic on telephone number +31 40 888 85 50. If necessary, a telephone appointment with the continence nurse will be scheduled.