

Department of
NURSING

What to do if You are Experiencing Constipation?



What is Constipation?

Constipation refers to bowel movements that are infrequent or hard to pass. In most cases, this happens because the colon has absorbed too much water from the food that is in the colon.

What are the Symptoms of Constipation?

The main symptoms of constipation are increased difficulty or feeling discomfort when passing stools.

Other symptoms include:

- Passing stools lesser than 3 times a week
- Having lumpy or hard stools
- Straining to have bowel movements
- Feeling as though that there is a blockage in your anus that prevents bowel movements
- Feeling as though you are unable to completely empty the stool from your anus
- Needing help to empty your anus, such as using your hands to press on your abdomen or using a finger to remove stool from your anus

What are the Causes of Constipation?

While it is normal to have more than one cause for constipation, it is also not unusual for constipation to happen without a clear cause.

There are many potential causes of constipation, including:

- Lack of fibre in the diet
- Inadequate exercise
- Excessive or unusual stress
- Medical conditions such as hormonal (hypothyroidism), neurological (stroke, Parkinson disease), depression, eating disorders, colorectal cancer
- Side effects from medications
- Pregnancy

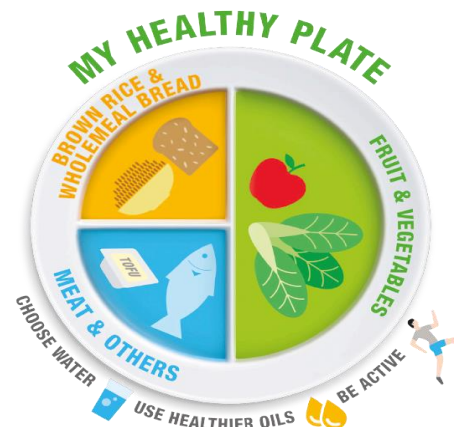
What can You do if You Have Constipation?

In most cases, constipation resolves itself without any need for treatment.

1. Lifestyle and Home Remedies

There are a few ways to ease the symptoms of constipation by using home remedies. These include:

- Increasing fibre intake






Please refer to Health Promotion Board – My Healthy Plate

- Drinking water
- Regular exercise as physical activity increases muscle activity in your intestines
- Responding to your body's urges to pass stools
- Taking your time in the bathroom to have enough time to have a bowel movement without distractions or feeling rushed. You should not stay in the bathroom for more than 10 minutes.
- Abdominal massage
- Pelvic floor muscle relaxation, also known as down training, teaches the pelvic floor muscles to relax and release. This exercise should be taught by a pelvic floor physiotherapist








2. Toileting Posture

Trying to maintain a good toileting posture may be useful if you find it difficult to pass stools.

Here are some tips you can try:

	<p>Knees higher than hips</p>
	<p>Lean forwards and put elbows on your knees</p>
	<p>Bulge out your abdomen and straighten your spine</p>

Please refer to the Bristol stool chart and observe the kind of stools you are having.

<p>Type 1</p>		<p>Separate hard lumps, like nuts</p>	<p>May have constipation</p>
<p>Type 2</p>		<p>Sausage-shaped but lumpy</p>	
<p>Type 3</p>		<p>Like a sausage but with cracks on the surface</p>	<p>Ideal stool</p>
<p>Type 4</p>		<p>Like a sausage or snake, feels smooth and soft</p>	
<p>Type 5</p>		<p>Soft blobs with clear-cut edges</p>	<p>May have diarrhoea</p>
<p>Type 6</p>		<p>Fluffy pieces with ragged edges</p>	
<p>Type 7</p>		<p>Watery, no solid pieces</p>	