



**University Hospitals
Bristol and Weston**
NHS Foundation Trust

Patient information service
Trustwide








Tips for your bowel problem



Poo (stool) consistency

The first thing to consider is your poo consistency.

Bristol Stool Chart

Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
Type 2		Sausage-shaped but lumpy
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on the surface
Type 4		Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
Type 5		Soft blobs with clear-cut edges
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces. Entirely Liquid

On the scale (page 3), type 4 is what is considered as 'normal' consistency, so that it sets off the normal reflexes and sensations, without urgency or discomfort, and you can pass it easily without straining. It may vary from day to day either way according to what you are eating.

If you are type **5 to 7**, loose or watery poo, try to stick to the **first list** of foods on **page 5** so that you are still including fibre but in a soluble form, which your body will find easier to process.

If you are tending to produce type **1 to 3**, hard, pebbly, or large firm poo, you need to include a higher proportion of foods containing insoluble fibre in your diet. This is the **second list** of foods on **page 6**.

Follow the tips suggested, so that you avoid abdominal discomfort, and increase your intake gradually, over a period of a few days.

The **third list** is foods that you may consider trying to reduce because they occasionally can worsen symptoms such as constipation, abdominal bloating and pain, diarrhoea or excessive wind.

Suggested diet for constipation, diarrhoea or wind:

- keep to regular meals, and eat small portions more frequently rather than large meals
- try to sit at a table, give yourself plenty of time, relax and chew well
- above all, eat plenty of variety and enjoy your food!

List one: safe foods



Soluble fibre

Base your meals and snacks on these foods.

Make them the larger proportion of what you are eating.

Always start with soluble fibre on an empty stomach.

- Rice, rice cereals, rice cakes,
- pasta, soy, bulgar wheat,
- oatmeal, porridge, oatcakes, oat bread,
- barley, rye, cous cous, quinoa,
- cornmeal, corn cereals, soft tortillas,
- carrots, parsnips, swede, turnip, beetroot,
- butternut squash, pumpkin,
- yams, potatoes, sweet potatoes,
- avocados, mangoes, bananas,
- apple sauce, pear purée.

List two: foods necessary but to be careful with



These are foods that are vital in your diet, and can make up some of your five-a-day. They are higher in insoluble fibre.

Avoid eating them on an empty stomach if possible – eat your safe foods first. For example, have an oatcake or porridge for breakfast and then fruit.

Cook, chop, peel or purée to enable easier digestion.

Eat in small, frequent amounts, chewing well.

- Whole wheat, whole grains, muesli,
- nuts, seeds, popcorn,
- berries, grapes, cherries, tomatoes, apples, pears (safer if peeled and without pips or seeds),
- raisins, dates, sultanas, prunes, figs, nectarines, apricots, kiwis, peaches, melon, courgette, marrow, cucumber, pineapple, rhubarb, celery, citrus fruits, beans, lentils, peas, runner beans, french beans,
- bean sprouts, peppers, aubergines, cabbage,
- kale, greens, spinach, salad leaves, broccoli, sprouts, onion, leeks, garlic, fresh herbs.

List three: take care – trigger foods



Reduce these foods, or better still, avoid them completely.

Reduce fat in your diet by three quarters and use mono or poly-unsaturated oils.

Never eat fatty foods on an empty stomach – eat soluble fibre foods first.

Food	Possible symptoms
Red meat or dark poultry meat	Constipation
Milk	Lactose intolerance – diarrhoea, excessive bloating, sometimes constipation
Cheese, butter, fried food, saturated oils, lard, coconut milk, egg yolk, solid chocolate	High fat can sometimes cause looser poo
Coffee, caffeinated beverages	Caffeine stimulates your bowels and can make poo looser, occasionally bloating and constipation
Fizzy drinks	Bloating and abdominal discomfort
Artificial sweeteners	Laxative effect
Alcohol, beer	Can cause looser poo, bloating

Some foods containing processed wheat, such as pizza, pasta and white bread, and vegetables of the cabbage family, such as cauliflower, cabbage and broccoli, can cause more bloating and wind.

Different foods affect different individuals, so it is a question of trying them first to see how they affect you.

Tips for reducing abdominal gas

If you are especially affected by embarrassing wind, uncomfortable abdominal bloating and pain, try these tips to help reduce it and make your bowels more comfortable.

Eat slower to reduce the amount of air swallowed on eating.

Drink plenty of water; at least two litres a day. Cut right down on stimulant beverages such as coffee and tea, and also fizzy drinks. Try herb teas such as peppermint, camomile, dill and fennel, which help reduce the production of wind.

Increase your fibre intake but be aware of the following:

- avoid beans with skins, but you may be all right with lentils and houmous. You may find that vegetarian soya products can cause wind, so eat in small amounts with foods from the first list
- avoid vegetables in the cabbage family, especially cauliflower and brussel sprouts, and also turnips, aubergines and onions
- peel apples and pears; you can also mash or purée them and bananas to make them more easily digestible.

Cut down on sugary or sweet food. If you feel hungry between meals, have a drink of water first, and then try an oatcake, either on its own or with a smear of butter, spread or houmous, or a small handful of nuts such as almonds or brazil nuts (have no more than a handful of peanuts or other nuts a day, or try toasted seeds instead).

Alcohol, especially beer, is known to make wind symptoms worse.

Eat three to four live yoghurts a week.

Try cutting down on milk for a week to see if it has any effect.

Try cutting down on wheat products – eat oat products or bread made with oat flour. Avoid pasta, pizzas, cakes, biscuits and pastry, and use arrowroot instead of flour to thicken sauces.

Confine your daily carbohydrate intake to one meal and keep it separate from your daily protein intake. For example, have fish and vegetables for lunch, and potatoes and vegetables for dinner.

Try acidophilus tablets and charcoal tablets from health food shops.

Water intake

Water intake is important for all stool types so that the body can balance the stool consistency easily, so aim for between six to eight glasses of water a day. This can be in the form of squash or flavoured with a dash of fruit juice, or you could have herbal or fruit teas or green tea.

It is best to reduce your caffeine intake, as it will speed up your body's metabolism and stimulate the kidneys to eliminate water from the body, and has a slight dehydrating effect, so if you are a tea or coffee drinker keep to less than three cups a day.

To improve you go to the toilet

The following technique is to help you adapt your body clock to be triggered at a regular time of day to help you go to the toilet more easily without straining (as well as improving your poo consistency). It will also help you to evacuate more fully, to prevent rectal discomfort or leakage during the day.

1. Make time every day, after a reasonable breakfast, to visit the bathroom or toilet, even if you haven't had a feeling of the need to go.

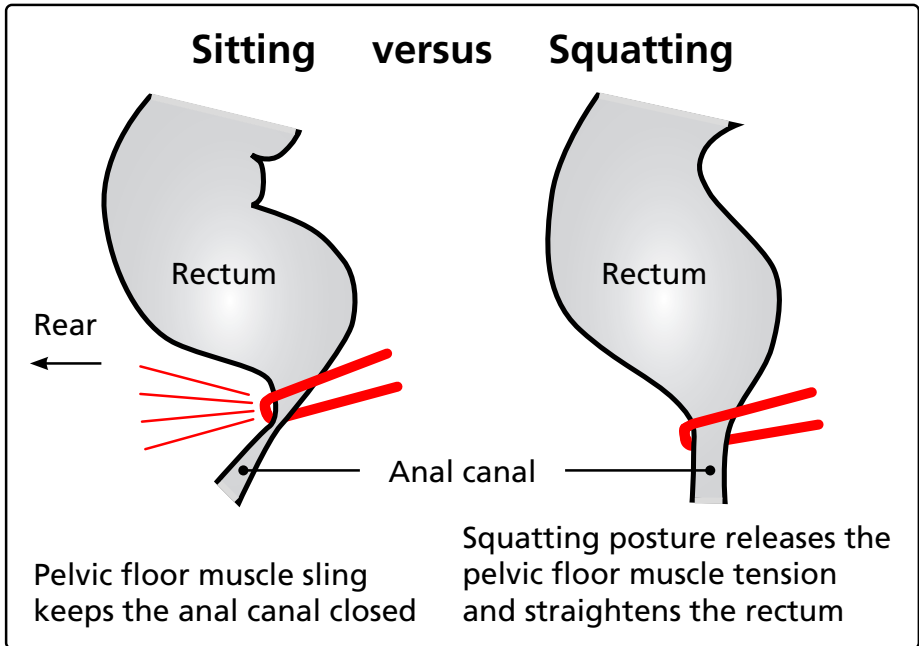
2. Make the bathroom or toilet a comfortable and relaxing place to be in.
3. Make sure you are not disturbed, and give yourself plenty of time. Don't rush.
4. When you are sitting on the toilet, prop your feet up on a small stool or pile of books so that your knees are comfortably apart and a little higher than your hips. Keeping your back straight, lean forward, resting your elbows on your thighs if you want. This mimics a more natural squatting position.



Image provided by the Multiple Sclerosis Trust. Used with permission.

5. Relax as much as possible in this position, breathing slowly and easily, using your abdominal muscles to breathe in, and relaxing them to breathe out. If you are not sure about this try the exercise for diaphragmatic breathing (pages 10 to 11).
6. If you feel the need to strain to empty completely, or you want to try to trigger your bowels to open:
 - make sure you stay nice and relaxed throughout and keep the sphincter muscle as relaxed as possible
 - imagine you are wearing a tight belt round your waist, and when you breathe out, expand your waist muscles against the imaginary belt – this is what we call 'bracing'
 - when you get to the end of your breath, relax and breathe normally, still keeping your sphincter muscle as relaxed as you can
 - repeat again on another breath out until the poo has passed easily.
7. Push no longer than your breath out lasts naturally – don't force out your breath, or strain, and avoid holding your breath so that you go red in the face.

8. If you have 'braced' while breathing out up to 10 times and nothing has worked, try again later in the day, preferably after a meal. See the tips on page 12 for stimulating you bowels the natural way.
9. It may be that you have urgency and need to get to the loo very quickly in the mornings, but try and get into the position as best you can, and when the poo is passing, breathe out and gently brace with your waist muscles in the same way, so that you empty more completely.



Diaphragmatic breathing

This exercise is not only to help you relax when sitting on the toilet for helping evacuation, but also for relaxing in general if you are inclined to a little stress.

It has the added benefit of gentle massage to the abdomen, improving bowel circulation and movement, and regulating constipation, irritable bowel syndrome and diarrhoea.

The aim is to use the diaphragm, a sheet of muscle dividing your chest from your abdomen, to draw the air into your lungs (babies and animals do this quite naturally). Adults often lose this ability, and tend to use their shoulders and the top of their lungs, so that only half of the lungs are used. If you use your diaphragm to pull in the air, you will use the whole capacity of your lungs.

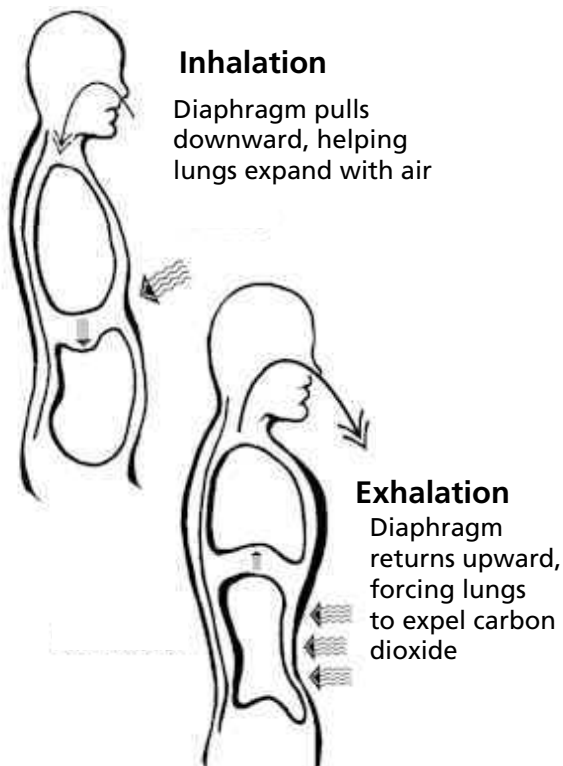


Image provided by the Orsee Group. Used with permission.

Try the following exercise:

1. lie on a bed with one hand on your chest and one on your abdomen
2. slowly take a breath in
3. the hand on your abdomen should rise higher than the hand on your chest
4. breathe out and relax
5. the hand on your abdomen should sink down again.

This may need some practice, and to begin with you can try actually pushing your abdomen out as you breathe in, and pulling it in as you breathe out.

Practise this daily, and try not to breathe too fast – you will get dizzy! Keep to slow, even, breathing.

To stimulate your bowels to open (if you don't get a regular feeling to go)

- 1.** Follow steps one to six in the 'improving bowel evacuation' section, and if there is any material in the rectum, the gentle bracing should trigger the reflex to poo.
- 2.** Other tips to trigger your bowel to open regularly:
 - when your stomach is full, it sets off a wave down the bowel, so make sure you have a good breakfast and regular meals through the day
 - you can also set off this wave reflex by drinking a large glass (about a pint) of warm water
 - take regular exercise (brisk walking, yoga and swimming are good). The government recommends a minimum of 30 minutes of exercise five times a week, or 10,000 steps a day
 - relaxation and diaphragmatic breathing – relaxation daily using diaphragmatic breathing can help regularity
 - eat more soluble fibre and plenty of vegetables in your diet – see the section on diet on pages three to five.
- 3.** As before, if none of these work, leave it for a time, don't let it prey on your mind, and try again later or after your next meal.

More food tips

Insoluble fibre made safer:

Make your own **thick vegetable soup** – cook chopped carrots, parsnips, swede, garlic cloves (optional), onion, and, when tender, blend them in the saucepan with a hand blender. Add salt, pepper and basil to taste.

Try home-made **smoothies** – an assortment of fruits with ice, or milk, yoghurt or fruit juice, puréed in a blender. Bought ones can contain added sugar, so make sure to check the ingredients.

Make your own **fruit salad** – chop or slice a selection of fruits and pour orange or apple juice over them.

Recipes

Houmous with oatcakes (both high in soluble fibre) and **crudités** (insoluble fibre) – good for a packed lunch or snack between meals.

- Two oatcakes
- One carrot, washed, cut into sticks
- Four baby sweetcorn
- Half a green pepper, cut into strips

For the houmous:

- One can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- Two tablespoons tahini paste
- Two cloves garlic, peeled (to your taste)
- Three tablespoons lemon juice
- A sprinkling of chopped coriander
- A pinch of paprika
- Three tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Fresh black pepper to season

Blend chickpeas, tahini, garlic, lemon juice and coriander on a low speed, and as it blends drizzle in the olive oil – you are aiming for a smooth and creamy mix, so add more olive oil in the same way if it is too dry.

Taste and season, and garnish with a pinch of paprika. Put in a pot in your lunch box with the crudités and oatcakes.

Oats and bananas

(Suitable for children from six months, or for breakfast for any age)

Preparation time: **eight minutes**

6 fl oz fresh or formula milk
One small banana
Four to five tablespoons oats

Peel and partially mash the banana. Warm the milk on the stove on a low heat. Add the banana and cook for five minutes. When the banana is mushy in the milk, add the oats and cook for a further one to two minutes. Remove from the heat, cool slightly and serve.

Oats, and particularly oatmeal, are some of the healthiest foods you can eat. They are high in complex carbohydrates and soluble fibre and provide a slow release of energy that will keep you going until your next meal, therefore making them the ideal winter breakfast cereal. Oats have also been proven to lower cholesterol levels.

Bulgur and butternut squash

Preparation: **10 minutes**

Cooking: **20 minutes**

Serves: **two**

1 kg butternut squash, peeled and diced

200g / 1¼ cups feta cheese, cubed

A handful of fresh sage, chopped, or half a teaspoon dried

The juice of one lemon

200g / 1¼ cups of bulgur wheat, cooked as per instructions on the packet

Freshly ground black pepper

Roast the butternut squash in the oven, covered at 180C / 350F / gas mark 4 until it is just starting to soften.

Combine the cooked bulgur wheat, feta and roasted squash.

Add the chopped sage and black pepper and toss together.
Drizzle with lemon juice and serve.

Useful information

Information about soluble and insoluble fibre

www.nutrition.org.uk/healthyliving/basics/fibre.html



A useful app to monitor your poo consistency

www.bristolstoolchart.net



Find your nearest toilet app

- **Apple iTunes**

itunes.apple.com/us/app/flush-toilet-finder-map/id955254528



- **Google Play Store**

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=toilet.samruston.com.toilet&hl=en&gl=US>



Correct position on the toilet

www.bladderandbowel.org/help-information/resources/toilet-positions



Recipes to help your bowels

www.theibsnetwork.org/news/recipes



Information on constipation

www.patient.info/health/constipation



More information on living with incontinence

www.incontinence.co.uk/category/living-with-incontinence



More information on the late effects of pelvic radiotherapy

www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/treatment/types-of-treatment/radiotherapy/pelvic-radiotherapy/late-effects-of-pelvic-radiotherapy



Notes

As well as providing clinical care, our Trust has an important role in research. This allows us to discover new and improved ways of treating patients.

While under our care, you may be invited to take part in research. To find out more please visit: www.uhbw.nhs.uk

Help us prevent the spread of infection in hospital. Please make sure your hands are clean. Wash and dry them thoroughly/use the gel provided. If you have been unwell in the last 48 hours please consider whether your visit is essential.

Smoking is the primary cause of preventable illness and premature death. For support in stopping smoking contact **NHS Smokefree on 0300 123 1044.**

Drinkline is the national alcohol helpline. If you're worried about your own or someone else's drinking, you can call this free helpline in complete confidence. **Drinkline on 0300 123 1110.**

To access all patient leaflets and information please go to the following address:
<http://foi.avon.nhs.uk/>

Bristol switchboard: 0117 923 0000
Weston switchboard: 01934 636 363
www.uhbw.nhs.uk



For an interpreter or signer please contact the telephone number on your appointment letter.



For this leaflet in large print or PDF format, please email patientleaflets@uhbw.nhs.uk.

