THE WELL BEHAVED BOWEL

How to keep your bowel under control

Not everyone has a bowel which works properly, but you can help keep yours in order by following some simple guidelines. This leaflet offers hints on how to prevent bowel control problems and answers some commonly asked questions.
Healthy Bowel Habits

You can keep your bowel under control by following these simple guidelines:

Bowels benefit from routine! About half an hour after meals is the most usual time for a bowel action. Eating reasonably regularly can help your bowel get into a predictable pattern. And don't miss breakfast!

Only take as long as you need: don't sit for ages on the toilet. You should be able to empty the bowel with minimal effort. Try not to strain: allow yourself enough time and privacy to empty the bowel properly and relax!

When you feel the need to empty the bowel - respond! If you keep ignoring the bowel (because you are busy or there are too many people around) you can make yourself constipated.

Eat properly. Fibre can improve your bowel habit. Best advice is to eat five portions of fruit or vegetables a day for health. However, if you have trouble controlling the bowels or suffer severe constipation, too much fibre can make things worse or cause a lot of wind.

Limber up! Regular exercise can stimulate the bowel to work regularly.
Answers to your Questions

How often should I empty my bowel?
Anything between three times a day and three times a week is normal.

When should I seek medical advice?
Most bowel disorders are minor, but some are serious. Always see your doctor if:
- You see any blood with your stools
- You have a change in bowel habit you cannot explain that lasts more than a few days
- You lose weight without trying
- You have pain in your abdomen or when you pass a motion
- You cannot control your stools, or leak from the back passage

Some medicines can upset bowel habit. Ask your pharmacist or doctor if you suspect this.

How common are bowel control problems?
Many people - about one in 50 - have some experience of poor bowel control. But there are effective treatments that can help, or often cure, the condition.

Where can I go for help?
You can call our Helpline (see over) and talk in confidence to a specialist nurse. Your family doctor, practice nurse or health visitor can all help. You can contact your local continence nurse specialist through your doctor - or call our Helpline to get their details.
This leaflet focuses on good habits to help you avoid bowel control problems such as leakage. It does NOT cover other conditions and bowel diseases, some of which are serious. See inside for when to seek medical advice.

For confidential advice, information and help about bowel (or bladder) control, call our Helpline:

0845 345 0165

Open Monday to Friday, 9:30-1:00
(Local rate call charge from any landline in the UK)

Or write, enclosing a large self-addressed envelope, and giving brief details of your condition to:

The Helpline Nurse
The Continence Foundation
307 Hatton Square
16 Baldwins Gardens
London EC1N 7RJ

Or email us at: continence-help@dial.pipex.com

Our website has a wide range of useful information and helpful suggestions on all aspects of continence:

www.continence-foundation.org.uk

This leaflet has been produced with the aid of an educational grant from Coloplast. The Foundation is a registered charity helping people with bladder and bowel problems. Any donation you can make will help us to help more people in the future. Cheques can be made out to "The Continence Foundation", or call us for 020 7404 6875 (office hours) for more details.

Cartoons by Philip Spencer

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