

# Constipation

Constipation means that you are not able to open your bowels (poo) as regularly as you normally do. Constipation can be a common problem, but many people find it embarrassing to talk about it.

Signs of constipation include:

- moving your bowels less than you usually do
- your stools (poo) becoming harder
- straining to move your bowels
- a feeling of not having emptied your bowel but being unable to pass any more stool
- your tummy becoming bloated or uncomfortable.

Everyone's normal bowel pattern is different. But as a general guide, you should let your doctor or nurse know if you have not had a bowel movement for three days, unless this is usual for you.

A lack of fibre (roughage) in your diet, not drinking enough and not being active can cause constipation. Some medicines can also cause it, including some chemotherapy drugs, some anti-sickness drugs and the painkillers morphine and codeine. If you are taking regular painkillers, you may need a laxative to help prevent constipation. Laxatives are medicines that can help you move your bowels. There are different types of laxative. Your doctor or nurse will recommend one depending on the cause of the constipation.

## Tips to help with constipation

- Make sure you eat plenty of fibre (roughage) each day. Good sources of fibre include:
  - wholewheat breakfast cereals like Weetabix®, Shredded Wheat® or muesli
  - wholemeal bread and flour
  - brown rice
  - wholemeal pasta
  - fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Make sure you drink plenty of fluids – both hot and cold drinks will help. Aim to drink at least two litres (three and a half pints) a day. This is particularly important if you increase the amount of fibre in your diet, as eating fibre without drinking enough fluids can make constipation worse.
- You could try a natural remedy for constipation. These include prune juice, prunes, fig syrup and dried apricots.
- Gentle exercise, such as walking, will help keep your bowels moving.
- If the constipation is due to medicines that you are taking, it may be possible to change the dose you take. Your doctor can give you more advice.
- If you have cancer of the bowel, or you think your cancer treatment is causing constipation, ask your doctor or specialist nurse for advice.

**Local resources:**

Resource	Contact details

**National resources:**

Resource	Contact details
Bladder and Bowel Community	<p><b>www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org</b></p> <p><b>Tel</b> 0845 345 0165</p> <p><b>Email</b> <a href="mailto:help@bladderandbowelcommunity.org">help@bladderandbowelcommunity.org</a></p>

**Further information**

- **MAC13613 Eating problems and cancer**
- **MAC11671 Managing the symptoms of cancer**
- **[macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/eating-problems/constipation.html](http://macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/eating-problems/constipation.html)**

**More information and support**

More than one in three of us will get cancer. For most of us it will be the toughest fight we ever face. And the feelings of isolation and loneliness that so many people experience make it even harder. But you don't have to go through it alone. The Macmillan team is with you every step of the way.

Visit **macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.

Hard of hearing? Use textphone **0808 808 0121**, or Text Relay. Speak another language? We have telephone interpreters. We provide information in a range of languages and formats. Visit **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats** or call us.