

# Constipation

This information is about constipation. Constipation means that you are not able to pass stools (poo) as often as you normally do. It can become difficult or painful. Signs of constipation can also include:

- a feeling of not having emptied your bowel, but being unable to pass any more stool
- a tummy that is bloated and uncomfortable
- feeling sick.

Constipation can be caused by:

- a lack of fibre in your diet
- not drinking enough
- not being active
- some cancer treatments
- some medicines – these include strong (opioid) painkillers such as morphine and codeine, iron tablets and some anti-sickness drugs.
- high levels of calcium in the blood.

Constipation can be a common problem. Many people find it difficult to talk about. But as a general guide, you should let your doctor or nurse know if you have not had a poo at least 3 times during the last week, or you are pooing less often than usual.

If you have constipation, your doctor, nurse or pharmacist might recommend a laxative. Laxative medicines are used to treat constipation. There are different types. If you are on regular painkillers, you may need a laxative to help prevent constipation.

## Tips for managing constipation

- Try to have plenty of fibre in your diet unless your healthcare team tell you differently. You can get fibre from wholegrain bread and cereals, vegetables and fruit with the skin on. It is also in bran and seeds. If you have cancer of the [gullet \(oesophagus\)](#) or [bowel](#), always ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist before having fibre. They can give you specific advice about dealing with constipation.
- Try to drink at least 2 litres (3½ pints) of fluid a day unless your healthcare team tell you differently.
- Try regular gentle exercise, such as walking. This will help keep your bowels moving.
- Try natural remedies for constipation. These include apricots, dried fruit, prunes, prune juice and syrup of figs.
- It is always best to check advice with your healthcare team. You may have different needs relating to your cancer type, or from effects of cancer treatments.

## Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets, and leaflets on [orders.macmillan.org.uk](https://orders.macmillan.org.uk) such as:

- [Healthy eating and cancer](#)
- [Healthy eating and cancer audiobook](#)
- [Managing the symptoms of cancer](#)
- [Eating problems and cancer](#)
- [Eating problems and cancer audiobook](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line on **0808 808 00 00**.

## Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://macmillan.org.uk) where you can [chat online](#) to one of our team.

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the [Relay UK app](#).  
Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

Or if you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#). Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls or visits with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

## Other useful contact details

- Bladder & Bowel Community – visit [www.bladderandbowel.org](https://www.bladderandbowel.org)
- Bladder and Bowel UK – visit [www.bbuk.org.uk](https://www.bbuk.org.uk)

## Notes and questions

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