

# Constipation

Constipation is common and it affects people of all ages. You can usually treat it at home with changes to your diet and lifestyle.

Read separate advice on how to manage:

- [constipation in babies \(0 to 6 months\)](#)
- [constipation in children](#)

## Check if it's constipation

It's likely to be constipation if:

- you haven't had a poo at least 3 times in a week
- the poo is often difficult to push out and larger than usual
- the poo is often dry, hard or lumpy

You may also have a stomach ache and feel bloated or sick.

## How to treat constipation in adults

Changes to your diet and lifestyle can help treat constipation.

You may notice a difference within a few days. Sometimes it takes a few weeks before your symptoms improve.

### Make changes to your diet

To make your poo softer and easier to pass:

- drink plenty of fluids
- do not drink alcohol
- increase the fibre in your diet
- add some wheat bran, oats or linseed to your diet

### Increase your activity

A daily walk or run can help you to poo more regularly.

## Improve your toilet routine

Keep to a regular time and place and give yourself plenty of time to use the toilet. Do not delay if you feel the urge to poo.

To make it easier to poo, try resting your feet on a low stool while going to the toilet. If possible, raise your knees above your hips.

## Talk to a pharmacist

Speak to a pharmacist if diet and lifestyle changes are not helping. They can suggest a suitable laxative. These are medicines that help you poo more regularly.

Most laxatives work within 3 days. They should only be used for a short time.

Laxatives are not recommended for children unless your GP prescribes them.

## When to see your GP

Talk to your GP if you:

- are not improving with treatment
- are regularly constipated and it lasts a long time
- are bloated and it lasts a long time
- have blood in your poo
- if your poo has changed colour (become very dark or pale)
- have unexpectedly lost weight (or a child has not grown or gained weight)
- feel very tired all the time

## Constipation during pregnancy

Constipation is common during pregnancy and for 6 weeks after giving birth. Pregnancy hormones can cause your poo move more slowly through your intestine.

Only take iron supplements if your GP or midwife has said you need them.

Read more about [constipation in pregnancy](#)

## Causes of constipation in adults

Constipation has many possible causes. Sometimes there is no obvious reason.

The most common causes include:

- not eating enough fibre – such as fruit, vegetables and cereals
- not drinking enough fluids
- not exercising or being less active
- often ignoring the urge to go to the toilet
- changing your diet or daily routine
- stress, anxiety or depression
- a side effect of medicine

In much rarer cases, constipation may be caused by a medical condition.

## Complications of long-term constipation

Long-term constipation can lead to faecal impaction. This is where poo has built up in your rectum. The main symptom is diarrhoea after a long bout of constipation.

Faecal impaction may be treated with:

- stronger laxatives – prescribed by your GP
- a suppository – medicine you place in your bottom
- a mini enema – where fluid is passed through your bottom, into your bowel
- a doctor or nurse removing some of the poo

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