

Constipation - Lifestyle and Diet Education

What is Constipation?

Constipation is defined as having less than three bowel motions per week with stools that are difficult or hard to pass. They may require you to push, strain, digital extract or you can feel incompletely empty. Untreated constipation can put stress on your bladder and pelvic floor muscles/ fascia, weakening them over time, which may lead to pelvic floor issues later on. Straining to pass a bowel motion can lead to haemorrhoids (the veins in the rectum become swollen and itchy).

How to Manage Constipation

Fluids - Pregnant and Breastfeeding women need to increase their fluid intake. Breastfeeding women should increase it to about 3 Litres. Having a glass of warm water in the morning can help to get your bowels moving first thing.

Foods - Try to eat foods that are more 'watery' in texture, or hold water in. e.g chia seeds, psyllium husk, soups, stews, pears, kiwi fruits, berries, salads, whole grain bread, brown rice, dried fruits and green vegetables.

Avoid foods that may worsen constipation, such as bananas, white flour, white rice, processed foods, dense heavy breads and too much red meat.

Toileting - 1, Make sure that your knees are bent and are higher than your hips (it may help to use a footstool/toilet rolls).

2, Lean forward from the hips with a straight back.

3, Gently bulge your tummy muscles forward as you take a deep breath in and then allow your waist to widen. This allows us to relax our pelvic floor.

4, Make sure you breathe and keep your mouth open, some people talk or make a noise like the 'moooo' or pretend to blow through a straw, so to fully relax your pelvic floor and prevent straining and contracting your pelvic floor.

5, Use hand to splint upwards on the vagina, to help passing a poo



Exercise - Trying to walk continuously for a minimum of 20mins every day can really help to get the bowels moving.

First thing in the morning – after your cup of warm water, try some abdominal massage

Stool softeners - Speak to your GP, Pharmacist, to see if this is something you may need to help your stools to a softer consistency.

Further management - If these strategies do not improve your symptoms, make an appointment with your women's health physiotherapist, as they may need to assess your pelvic floor by carrying out a vaginal/rectum examination.