



Constipation

You came to the emergency department with constipation. The doctor checked you and did not find a serious cause that needs you to stay in hospital. This sheet explains how to get your bowels moving again and when to come back.

What is it?

Constipation means passing stools less often than usual, or stools that are hard, dry or painful to pass. Common causes are not drinking enough, too little fibre, not moving much, ignoring the urge to go, and some medicines, especially strong pain killers. It can cause belly cramps, bloating and a feeling that you have not fully emptied.

Looking after yourself at home

- Drink plenty of water through the day, unless your doctor has told you to limit fluids.
- Eat more fibre: fruit, vegetables, beans, lentils and wholegrain bread or cereal. Add it slowly.
- Walk or move about every day. Activity helps the bowel work.
- Go to the toilet when you feel the urge. Do not hold it in.
- Raise your feet on a small stool when sitting on the toilet, and do not strain hard.

Medicines

- A laxative may help. Take it only as your doctor told you or as the packet says, and stop once your bowels are regular.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist whether any of your usual medicines could be causing constipation. Do not stop them yourself.

Follow-up

- See your family doctor or health centre if you are not better within 1 week.
- See your family doctor if constipation keeps coming back, you lose weight without trying, or your bowel habit has changed for weeks.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- Severe belly pain, or pain that keeps getting worse
- Vomiting, especially if you cannot keep fluids down
- A swollen, hard belly and you cannot pass wind
- A lot of blood in your stool, or black, tar-like stools
- Fever with belly pain
- Feeling faint or very unwell



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This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

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