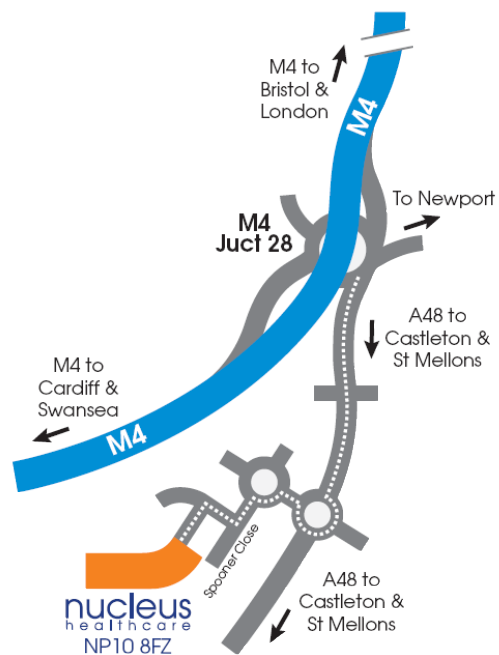


This fact sheet was designed to help you. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions of our specialists and nurses

If you have any problems following your procedure please ring

Nucleus Healthcare during opening hours 07.30hrs – 18.00hrs



CONSTIPATION

Nucleus Healthcare

Spooner Close

Newport

NP10 8FZ

TELEPHONE 01633 815900

FAX 01633 815915

Try the following tips for emptying your bowel correctly

When sitting on the toilet, your knees need to be slightly higher than your hips. You can achieve this by placing a box, upside down washing bowl or a couple of books under your feet then:

- Lean forward over your knees, keeping a small hollow in your back
- Relax your pelvic floor muscles. These are muscles that form a sling running from the back of your pelvis
- Breathe in and then breathe out through your mouth, allowing your tummy and waist to swell outwards
- Repeat this several times
- Lean backwards and repeat the breathing pattern
- Lean forwards and repeat
- Once you have finished opening your bowels, squeeze your pelvic floor muscles tightly

For further information:

www.corecharity.org.uk

www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

What is constipation?

A person is constipated when they pass stool less than 3 times per week, or if there is often a need to strain to pass stool (usually hard stool). Constipation is not harmful in itself but it can be very uncomfortable and as a result of chronic (long-term) constipation, you may develop one or more of the following conditions:

- Haemorrhoids (piles) – small swollen blood vessels in the back passage, which can bleed occasionally
- Fissure split in the back passage which may bleed/is painful when passing stool
- Rectal prolapse – the lining of the rectum falls down through the back passage

Some factors may make constipation worse:

- Lack of fibre in diet
- Poor fluid intake
- Certain medications (ask your nurse)
- Bad bowel habits (e.g. straining)
- Shift work
- Immobility
- Change of diet/environment
- Ignoring the need to open your bowels
- Emotional upsets

What makes the stool hard or dry?

Your digestive tract is one continuous tube that breaks down food products in a step-by-step process. Each part has a job to do.

The colon (large intestine) has the job of absorbing excess water from the waste and moving it to the rectum so it can be expelled. When the colon contractions (peristalsis) is disturbed the waste material either moves too slowly allowing lots of water absorption

and so the stool becomes too hard and dry (constipation), or moves too rapidly and is soft and watery (diarrhoea)

What causes constipation?

The peristalsis of the colon has been disturbed for some reason such as stress, medication, pregnancy, illness, resisting the urge to defecate, pain from haemorrhoids or fissures, lack of exercise, a low fibre diet or not drinking enough fluids. You may have irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or some other chronic condition. It may even be caused by overuse of stimulant laxatives or enemas.

Does constipation need investigation?

Any change in bowel habit like constipation should be investigated, as occasionally this can be a symptom of more serious conditions like bowel cancer. Colonoscopy is the most accurate test available for the large bowel and can identify or eliminate other more serious causes of constipation, especially in the older age group.

How can I become regular and stay that way?

You may need to make some simple changes in your lifestyle.

- Eat regular meals
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water, but also milk, fruit and vegetable juice and soup
- Exercise daily, such as walking, bicycling or swimming
- Respond to the urge to move your bowels. If you delay you may have to strain later
- Avoid straining. It may cause irritation and haemorrhoids
- Add fibre to your diet. Fibre is undigested plant residue which adds bulk to help keep things moving through your intestines. Fibre also holds water and tends to soften the stool.

Most Westerners average only half the recommended daily fibre intake because the foods we typically eat are so highly processed and the natural fibre is removed.

A high fibre diet concentrating on vegetable, fruits, grains and cereals is recommended. If this is still not adequate for you proprietary fibre products are available. Ask your doctor for advice on this.

What can I do about it?

- Talk about your problem. Don't be embarrassed – remember doctors, nurses and physiotherapists are trained to deal with such problems
- Take pride in your bowels
- Privacy and space will help you relax. Try not to strain and don't sit on the toilet for long periods
- Regularity is important but don't worry if you're not one of those people who empty their bowel every day
- Ignore your bowels at your peril. If you put off opening your bowels too often you can make yourself constipated
- Do some exercise. Regular exercise can help your bowel to work better
- Eat and drink properly. Have regular meals with plenty of fibre (fruit and veg) and drink lots of water
- If you take medication, check with your pharmacist or doctor whether these could be affecting your bowel habit