



Constipation

See a GP if you or your child:

- 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
- have unexpectedly lost weight (or a child has not grown or gained weight)
- feel very tired all the time

Speak to the GP before you stop taking any prescribed medication.

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

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

Check if it's constipation

It's likely to be constipation if:

- you or your child 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

However, it's not unusual for a breastfeeding baby to go a week without having a poo.

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

Things to look out for in babies and toddlers include:

- a lack of energy
- being irritable, angry or unhappy
- soiling their clothes

What causes constipation?

Constipation in adults 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 medication

Constipation is also common during pregnancy and for 6 weeks after giving birth.

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

A pharmacist can help with constipation

Speak to a pharmacist if diet and lifestyle changes aren't 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 they are prescribed by a GP.

How you can treat constipation yourself

Simple changes to your diet and lifestyle can help treat constipation. It's safe to try these simple measures when you're pregnant.

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 and avoid 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.

- Getting started with exercise
- Getting active with a disability or long-term condition
- Exercise during pregnancy

Improve your toilet routine

Keep to a regular time and place and give yourself plenty of time to use the toilet. Don't 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