

# Constipation



This is a reduced frequency in bowel movements compared to what is normal for that person and is often accompanied with straining to pass small hard stools. Sometimes it can be a side effect of prescribed medications.

## Symptoms include:

- Fewer bowel movements
- Straining to go to the toilet
- Hard or small stools
- Bloating
- Stomach cramps

## Red flag symptoms

- New or worsening constipation without an adequate explanation
- Blood in the stools which is often seen as black/tarry stools
- Unintentional weight loss
- Nausea and vomiting

## Self-care advice

- Drink plenty of fluid (about two litres a day). Avoid too many drinks containing caffeine as this can worsen constipation.
- Eat food rich in fibre such as fruit, vegetables and wholegrain cereals. Powdered bran is an easy way of introducing extra fibre into the diet as it is tasteless; although some people may not like the texture.
- Take regular exercise, e.g. walking, gardening and swimming, as a lack of activity can cause constipation.
- Don't delay in going to the toilet when you have the urge
- Short term use of a suitable laxative

## Onward referrals

- A suggestion of faecal impaction would need to be referred, this is often experienced as colicky pain, swollen abdomen and unexpected severe diarrhoea.

## Signposting

- Pharmacy First Scotland – Laxatives
- Common Ailment Service Wales – Laxatives

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