

Patient Information

Pelvic Floor Service

Pelvic Floor Exercises for improving Difficulty with Bowel Emptying

Introduction

The aim of this leaflet is to provide you with information and advice about effective bowel emptying. You may however need to experiment to find out which method works best. You will be aiming for a minimum of 3 bowel motions per week. If you take regular medication this may affect your bowel function. Check with us if you are unsure.

This information is intended only for patients under the care of the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals Pelvic Floor Service. It may not cover everything you want to know so please ask if you need further advice.

When is the best time to go to the toilet?

Around 3 or 4 times a day and especially when you eat, the food in your stomach causes a reflex contraction in your colon. This strong wave-like contraction moves stools through your colon so you are more likely to be able to evacuate your bowels after mealtimes. Sometimes hot or very cold drinks may also stimulate your gastro-colic reflex. Make sure you have a balanced diet and eat regularly along with plenty of fluids especially with meals.

Periodically you should feel the sensation of wind or stools in your rectum. This is called the sampling reflex. Nerve endings in the wall of your rectum send messages to your brain so you are consciously aware of what's there.

If you have a busy lifestyle or work in a job where it is not so easy to access toilet facilities regularly try not to get into a bad habit of putting off going to the toilet. Over time, this can slow down your bowels and make stools harder to evacuate.

What is the best position for effective emptying?

Sit leaning forward slightly with your feet raised on a small footstool to straighten the angle from your rectum to your anus (ano-rectal angle) and to widen your pelvis. Rest your forearms on your thighs so your elbows are near your knees and make sure your feet are flat on the footstool so you are fully relaxed. Make sure you can get into the correct position for evacuation especially if you use a commode or a raised toilet seat.



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Exercises for effective bowel emptying

The following exercises will help you to get into the habit of going to the toilet to empty your bowels. Set aside 5-10 minutes ideally after a meal when you are not going to be interrupted.

Identify the muscles you are going to use:

- **Your waist muscles** are used to push and propel with. Place your hands on either side of your waist – now cough. You will feel your muscles tighten. Now use these muscles to widen and expand your waist. This ‘brace’ manoeuvre increases downward pressure towards your pelvis
- **Your anal sphincter muscles** need to be relaxed and open when you go to the toilet. Notice the difference between squeezing and relaxing your anal sphincters.

Practise

Check your sitting position on the toilet and relax.

- Drop your shoulders. Breathe slowly and gently in through your nose and out through your mouth. Keep your mouth slightly open and relax your jaw. Let all your muscles relax.

Raise your abdominal pressure

- Imagine your anal canal like a lift. Your lift should be resting on the ground floor
- Take a small breath in and close the back of your throat
- Now brace outwards (widen your waist). When you are fully braced push/propel from your waist **back and downwards** to help you to push down into your back passage.

Do not strain

- Slowly push your lift down to the basement. Relax just a little for a second but keeping the momentum up so you remain braced.
- Brace outwards and push downwards again
- If you are not sure what this should feel like blowing up a party balloon or misting up a mirror. Concentrate on how it feels in your bottom and abdomen.

Use the breathe and brace manoeuvre as a pump. Repeat once or twice then take a short break as more than this will tire out your muscles.

If you are unable to empty after 10 minutes stop and try again later or when you get the sensation to go again. Do not keep going back and forth to the toilet –no more than 3 times a day.

What else can help?

Heathy, balanced diet:

Eating regularly and including plenty of fluids and fibre in your diet is usually helpful. If fibre makes your bowel function worse then you may need to include more fruit and vegetables in your diet.

The right environment:

Having enough privacy, time and no disturbances are important factors in effective evacuation. You may dislike using public toilets or feel inhibited using a toilet away from home but holding on is more likely to worsen your evacuation difficulties.

Abdominal massage:

Starting from your right groin press firmly with the heel of your hand moving upwards towards your ribs on the same side. Move your hand firmly across your upper abdomen towards your left side between your ribs and belly button. Next push firmly down your left side and then across your lower abdomen back to your right groin. You can use some baby oil or lotion if this helps. You will find through practice how long you need to massage and how much pressure to apply however this should not be painful.

Keep moving:

You can help your bowels to be less sluggish by making a conscious effort to keep active. Try to build in small changes on a regular basis to begin with. These may include using the stairs or avoiding long periods of sitting. Any form of active exercise such as walking, swimming or cycling, if you are able, will be beneficial.

Contact details for further information

Pelvic Floor Nurse Specialist

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital

Telephone: 01743 261083 (24hr answerphone)

Further information is available from;

- **Patient Advise and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS will act on your behalf when handling patient and family concerns, they can also help you get support from other local or national agencies. PALS, is a confidential service.

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, Tel: 0800 783 0057 or 01743 261691

Princess Royal Hospital, Tel: 01952 282888

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Other Sources of Information

- **The Pelvic Floor Society**

A national multi-professional body involved in supporting excellence in clinical practice, education and research, clinical standards, patient information and engagement in the commissioning of pelvic floor services.

Telephone: 020 7973 0307

Website: www.thepelvicfloorsociety.co.uk

- **Bladder and Bowel Foundation**

Information about bladder and bowel conditions, treatment and support

Telephone: 0870 770 3246

Website: www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

- **NHS 111**

A fast and easy way to get the right help, whatever the time. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

Telephone: 111 (free from a landline or mobile)

Website: www.nhs.uk

- **Patient UK**

Provides leaflets on health and disease translated into 11 other languages as well as links to national support/self-help groups and a directory of UK health websites.

Website: www.patient.info

- **Self-Help UK**

This is a directory of self-help groups and charities.

Website: www.selfhelp.org.uk

Website: www.sath.nhs.uk

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