

## Medications

Some medications may affect your bowel function, causing either diarrhoea or constipation – check with your doctor or pharmacist

If you have any further questions regarding looking after your bowel, contact your Continence Nurse Advisor or Stomal Therapy Nurse at your local health care agency

*\*The information in this brochure has been developed as a general guide only. Any concerns need to be discussed with your doctor or pharmacist*

# Healthy bowel habits for all



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Stoma / Wound / Continence

**Prepared as a guide by the:**  
Australian Association of  
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Education and Professional  
Development Subcommittee

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**Level IV Evidence (Expert Opinion)**

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## Healthy Bowel Habits

- There are a number of important things you need to consider when developing good bowel habits – starting early in life
- The aim of developing good bowel habits is to promote regular defaecation (opening your bowels). However it is not essential that you open them every day
- The number of times a healthy person uses their bowel varies greatly. This can range from 3 times per day to 3 times per week
- The following suggestions can help you to reach your goal

## Fibre

- It is recommended that you eat between 30 – 40 gram of fibre each day
- Fibre is found in fresh fruit, vegetables, nuts and grains
- Fibre supplements may be of benefit but you need to discuss this with your doctor or Pharmacist

**Do not overdose on fibre, as fibre in too large an amount can cause constipation**

## Fluids

- Bowel actions require fluid in order to remain soft and easy to pass
- We recommend that you drink 2 litres (6 – 8 glasses) of fluid each day unless you have a condition that restricts you from drinking this much
- A cup of hot water first thing in the morning helps to get the bowel moving
- Caffeine is found in tea, coffee, coke and fizzy drinks. Vary the fluid you drink but do not drink too much caffeine as this can dehydrate you

## Exercise and Activity

- Exercise stimulates your bowel and contributes to it working better

- Walking for 30 minutes daily is an ideal exercise
- Strengthening pelvic floor muscles can be useful
- If you are not able to exercise very well you may wish to try exercises in a chair – seek guidance from a physiotherapist or doctor
- Endeavour to reduce excessive stress in your life

## Going to the toilet

- To pass your bowel motion readily / easily you must have a strong urge to go to the toilet
- Do not go to the toilet until you have a strong urge to go. Soon after meals is often the time an urge is felt
- It is advisable **not to ignore** the urge to go to the toilet. If you do so continuously the faeces sits in the rectum and more fluid is absorbed, leading to constipation
- Avoid going “just in case”
- If nothing has happened in 30 seconds, leave the toilet and return when the urge is strong. **Do not strain**
- Ensure that the environment is private with few or no interruptions
- Do not rush, as this can lead to you not emptying the bowel properly

## Sitting on the toilet

- There is a right and wrong way to sit on the toilet and the right way enables straightening of the anorectal angle
  - This is the normal angle created between the anus and rectum due to the curve in the spine
- It is important that your feet can touch the floor (including children). If your feet are dangling, you could place a small foot stool under your feet
- Lean forward slightly with your elbows resting on your knees
- Lift your heels, as though you are on tiptoes
- This position straightens out the anorectal angle and makes bowel actions easier to pass
- Push your lower belly out to help relax your back passage muscles
- Don't strain to pass your motion