

Physiotherapy for bowel problems

Information for patients

Why do people get bowel problems?

Common bowel problems include uncontrollable wind, faecal urge incontinence, diarrhoea, and constipation. Bowel problems are common for people of all ages. There is not always an obvious cause. Things that can affect your bowels are:

- The sorts of foods you eat
- Drinks with caffeine or alcohol
- Some tablets, conditions or an operation
- Pregnancy and childbirth
- Diarrhoea
- Stress or anxiety
- Poor mobility or dexterity.

What can I do to help myself?

- Slowly cut down your caffeine intake (e.g. coffee, tea, cola and irn-bru)
- Eat a healthy diet containing fresh fruit and vegetables
- Try to drink between 1.5 - 2 litres of fluids per day
- Keep active and maintain your weight
- Do specific exercises, which will improve the strength and control of your pelvic floor muscles.

Try not to worry but do seek help if your condition does not improve or gets worse.

External anal sphincter exercises

The external anal sphincter is the muscle that you can normally control when you feel that your bowel is full and you need to go to the toilet. When you clench this muscle strongly, stool can be squeezed back up from the anal canal.

To strengthen this muscle:

- Lie, sit or stand with your knees slightly apart
- Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind, then squeeze these muscles as tightly as you can
- Hold this contraction for as long as you can
- Then relax the muscles completely for a few seconds before repeating this exercise.

Whilst doing this you should keep your stomach and buttocks relaxed and you should not hold your breath.

You will work with your physiotherapist to devise a suitable exercise programme.

Your physiotherapist is: _____

And can be contacted on: _____

Deferring techniques

By staying calm and distracting yourself when you have the urge to go to the toilet, you should be able to retrain your bowel habits and gradually improve your condition.

Your physiotherapist recommends:

External anal sphincter exercises

Tighten up your muscles: Try to hold for _____ seconds, then let go.

Relax for _____ seconds.

Repeat this _____ times.

Do this _____ times per day.

You are also recommended to:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Why can I no longer control wind?

Your anal and pelvic floor muscles may have become weakened or, are not working as they should. Your physiotherapist will explain how to improve these muscles.

What is faecal urge incontinence?

This occurs when you are not able to get to the toilet in time when you have a strong urge to empty your bowels.

Do I need to change my diet?

Some foods and drinks affect your bowels and keeping a good bowel habit diary could identify which items of food and drink are causing you problems.

This leaflet was compiled by the Lothian Continence Network Group. Ref. Lothian.BowelProblems, June 2021