

Effective techniques for opening your bowels (having a poo) if you have constipation

This leaflet outlines exercises you can do to help with your bowel problems. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to your clinical nurse specialist.

Introduction

Most of us during our lifetime have experienced a degree of constipation and had to strain to have a poo. However, you may now have begun to experience these problems more frequently, and struggling to pass a poo may be the 'norm' for you.

Test your technique:

- Do you take in a big gulp of air, close your lips tightly and push from your throat and upper chest when you try to poo?
- Do you pull in and tense your abdominal (tummy) muscles when you poo?

If you have answered 'yes' to either of these questions, you are actually making it harder to open your bowels as you are effectively 'closing off' the anus (back passage) and having to work your abdominal muscles much harder to push the poo through the anal canal to empty your bowels (evacuation).

Effective techniques to help

You may find these tips helpful if you have a sensation of not completely emptying your bowels or have to strain to have your bowels open.

Toilet position

Maintaining a good toilet position may help to pass a stool, if you usually have to strain to poo or suffer with constipation.

- Sit comfortably on the toilet seat with your knees about hip distance apart and your feet flat on the floor.
- Ideally, your knees should be slightly higher than your hips. If the toilet seat is quite high you may find it useful to put your feet on a small footstool or a pile of books.
- Lean forward and rest your forearms on your thighs. Try to relax.
- Try to breathe into the lower half of your lungs, and keep your mouth slightly open (to avoid straining which will in turn contract the pelvic floor muscles and make it more difficult to pass a poo).
- Then **brace** and **bulge**, **push** and **close off** (see overleaf).



Knees higher than hips. Lean forward and put elbows on your knees. Bulge out your abdomen. Straighten your spine.

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Brace, bulge, push and close off:

- 1. Brace:** try to 'widen your waist' by pushing your lower ribcage downwards and slightly outwards (you should notice your shoulders will slightly lower). It may help to place your hands over your lower ribcage, or your waist to feel this 'brace'. Breathe normally.
- 2. Bulge:** then, push your lower abdomen (tummy) out, i.e. make it bulge outwards. This should also stop any inappropriate contraction of the pelvic floor muscles. Remember to try not to hold your breath, breathe normally and try to keep your mouth slightly open. It may help if you place a hand on your abdomen (tummy) to feel the abdominal (tummy) muscles pushing against your hand. Again, try not to hold your breath but breathe normally.
- 3. Push:** keeping your mouth slightly open and breathing normally, push into your waist and lower abdomen (tummy). You should feel your tummy bulge out even more, this pushes the faeces (poo) from the rectum (lower end of the bowel) into the anal canal (back passage).

Remember try not to strain at this point

- ***You should not take a large gulp of air or push with your mouth closed.***
 - ***You should not have to strain to have a poo.***
 - ***You may need to repeat the brace, bulge and push technique a few times to empty your bowel completely, so try not to rush.***
- 4. Close off:** to ensure the anal canal (back passage) is closed off properly, after you have finished having a poo, pull in your lower abdominal muscles and squeeze and lift your anal sphincters (back passage) muscles for a few seconds (maybe 5 seconds).

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