A guide to managing constipation
Information for patients
This information leaflet has been prepared to help you understand why you are experiencing constipation and what might help you go to the toilet more normally.

What is constipation?

Constipation is an irregular bowel pattern and is a common condition. Symptoms are infrequent bowel movements and/or not being able to completely empty your bowels.

Some of the other common symptoms you may experience with constipation include:
- abdominal pain
- bloating
- hard stools
- nausea/vomiting
- straining.

What can cause constipation?

- Dehydration – a poor intake of fluid.
- Diet – a poor intake of fibre, seeds/nuts, pulses and fruit/vegetables.
- Lifestyle – a lack of physical activity.
- Medications – opioids (e.g. codeine, tramadol and morphine) and tricyclic antidepressants (e.g. amitriptyline).
- Pre-existing medical condition – such as Inflammatory Bowel Disease, Irritable Bowel Syndrome or Multiple Sclerosis.
How can we treat and prevent constipation?

- Increase your fluid intake to 6-8 glasses per day (excluding alcohol).
- Increase the amount of fibre you eat, for example, wholemeal bread, wholemeal pasta and rice.
- Increase the amount of fruit and vegetables you eat; five portions a day is recommended.
- Include nuts, pulses and seeds in your diet. Some examples of these include lentils, beans, sweet corn or linseed.
- Exercise within your own physical limits.

Your doctor or nurse will tell you if they feel you need any medicine to help relieve your constipation.

Medications for constipation

Your doctor may prescribe one or a combination of the medications below:

- **Bulking agents** (Fybogel/Normacol) – These help to soak up water in to the gut making stools heavier and softer, helping them to pass through your bowel more easily.
- **Osmotic agents** (lactulose/Movicol) – These work by increasing the amount of fluid in the gut.
- **Stimulants** (senna/bisacodyl) – These encourage the gut to move more quickly by stimulating the surrounding muscles.

It is important that you increase your fluid intake if you are taking any of the above laxatives.

If your constipation becomes severe and doesn’t respond to the medications above, we may then recommend a rectal suppository or enema. This is a small, soft, round ended ‘capsule’ that is inserted into your rectum, where it dissolves to help you open your bowels. Your doctor or nurse will discuss this with you.
If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221 473 or email PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk

If you need any advice after you have returned home please contact your GP.

For hospital appointment queries please call the Patient Contact Centre:

Tel: 01865 572 079

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