Constipation is a difficult issue to talk about but the problem can impact on many aspects of your quality of life, so needs to be managed well.

To obtain further information or help with any constipation questions contact your doctor, Continence Nurse Advisor or your Stomal Therapy Nurse. Visit [www.stomaltherapy.com](http://www.stomaltherapy.com) and click on “Find a STN”

Disclaimer  The information in this brochure:
- has been developed as a general guide only
- relates to adults only

Any concerns need to be discussed with your STN or doctor

Prepared as a guide by the:  
Australian Association of Stomal Therapy Nurses Inc. Education and Professional Development Subcommittee  
[www.stomaltherapy.com](http://www.stomaltherapy.com)

Reference  

Review due 2019  
*Level 1V Evidence (Expert Opinion)*
What Is Constipation?

• Constipation occurs when the bowel motions become harder or drier than usual. The motion is then harder to pass
• 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

Causes of Constipation

• Not drinking enough fluids
• Lack of exercise
• Lack of fibre in your diet
• Traveling
• Ignoring the urge to go to the toilet
• Some medications and medical conditions
• Emotional upsets, depression or stress
• Poor toilet facilities
• Continual use of laxatives – these may interfere with the normal functioning of your bowel and may cause your bowel to become dependent on them

How to Regulate Your Bowel Actions

• Eat regular meals
• Chew your food thoroughly and slowly
• Drink 2 litres (6 – 8 glasses) of fluid per day
• Exercise daily
• Increase the amount of fibre in your diet
• Go to the toilet when you have a strong urge

Exercise

• Exercise daily, for example walking, swimming or cycling
• If you are chair bound, you can still exercise many muscles – seek guidelines from a physiotherapist or doctor

Fibre

• It is recommended that you eat between 30 – 40 grams of fibre each day
• Fibre is found in fresh fruit, vegetables, nuts and grains
• It is important to drink 6 – 8 glasses per day when eating extra fibre
• Do not overdose on fibre as this can increase constipation and is only minimally effective in chronic constipation

Fluids

• A cup of hot water first thing in the morning helps to get the bowel moving
• Drink 2 litres (6 – 8 glasses) of varied fluids per day
• Vary the fluid with water, milk, soups, fruit and vegetable juices
• Avoid or limit caffeine intake as this can dehydrate. Caffeine will increase your urine output, so cups of tea, coffee and cola drinks should not be counted as part of your fluid intake
• Try not to drink too many fluids high in sugar

Sitting on the toilet

• The urge to go to the toilet is usually strongest shortly after a meal
• It is important that your feet can touch the floor
• Lean forward slightly with your elbows resting on your knees
• Straighten your back and push your belly out gently to help relax
• This position makes bowel actions easier to pass
• Don’t strain to pass your motion

What about Laxatives? (Stool softeners)

• Sometimes the above measures are not enough to prevent / relieve constipation and laxatives are required
• Some laxatives can increase constipation if not used correctly
• Speak to your doctor, Continence Nurse Advisor or Stomal Therapy Nurse to obtain advice about your best option