

MELBOURNE

Pregnancy &
Pelvic Physio

Healthy Bowel Habits

Importance of healthy bowels

Problems with bowel function can cause people significant discomfort and distress. Several steps can be taken to optimise bowel function.

A normal frequency for emptying your bowels can vary a lot between people, ranging from three times per day to once every three days.

What is most important is that you should be able to feel when your bowel is full, walk calmly to the toilet (without concern of having an accident), then empty their bowels on the toilet without pain or straining.

A healthy bowel motion is formed, but also soft and easy to pass.

Diet and fluid intake

Dietary Fibre and fluid work together to achieve a good stool consistency.

Aim to achieve the following each day:

- Drink 1.5 to 2 litres of fluid evenly paced through the day (mostly water)
- Include plenty of high fibre foods in all your daily meals (e.g. vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, nuts)
- Aim to eat regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch and dinner and a small snack like a piece of fruit and/or muesli bar for morning and afternoon tea)
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Some foods like pears, dates and prunes are especially helpful for achieving softer bowel motions.

Movicol sachets from the chemist are a type of stool softener that can be used if bowel motions are still too firm after implementing the above advice.

Healthy Bowel Habits continued

Exercise

30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise helps to keep the bowels moving. Examples of moderate intensity exercise include brisk walking, jogging, cycling, swimming and body weight exercises (e.g. squats, lunges, step ups, push ups, etc.)

Defecation dynamics

You should be able to empty the bowels without straining, the best posture on the toilet to achieve this is:

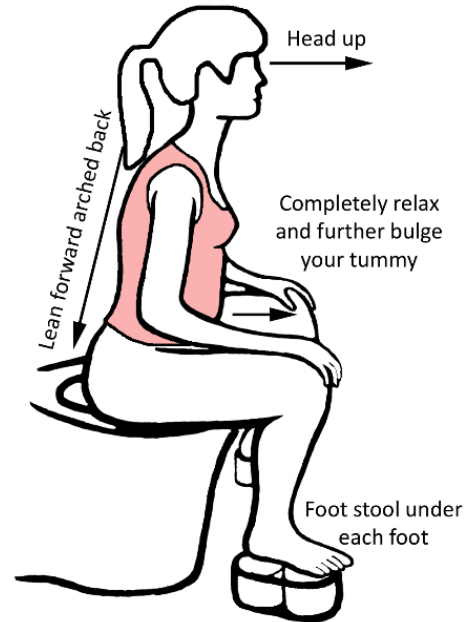
- Feet wide apart
- Knees higher than hips if possible (e.g. place feet up on 2 small steps or on toilet rolls)
- Keep the back straight and lean forward from the hips
- Rest your forearms on your thighs
- Bulge the belly out (this helps to relax the pelvic floor)
- Gently brace/tighten the bulged belly to help initiate the bowel motion if needed

Best time to empty the bowels

The bowels are most active in the first hour after waking in the morning. To take advantage of this, try to empty the bowels in the morning either soon after waking, after you have had breakfast or a hot drink. When you get the sensation that your bowel is full, sit on the toilet in the correct posture (pictured right). You may try bulging and bracing your stomach.








If nothing happens after 10 minutes, continue with your day.

Continue to monitor how your bowels feel during the day. The next time you feel the urge to empty your bowels, aim to get to the toilet within five minutes of feeling the urge and assume the correct posture again.



Correct posture for emptying bowels

Bristol Stool Chart

Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
Type 2		Sausage-shaped but lumpy
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on its surface
Type 4		Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
Type 5		Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (passed easily)
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces. Entirely Liquid