

What to do when you experience diarrhoea or constipation

1 Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea: Change in bowel habits – frequent loose / watery stools more than two or three times per day. Sudden onset diarrhoea is treated symptomatically and tests may not be necessary.

If there is blood in your stool or you become dehydrated, report to your doctor immediately. Chronic diarrhoea must be reported to and investigated by your doctor – colonoscopy / sigmoidoscopy may be necessary.

2 Treatment of sudden onset diarrhoea

	Eat small frequent meals
	Drink a lot of fluids
	Avoid greasy, spicy food
	Avoid dairy / high sugar drinks
	Try pasta / potato / bread / maize meal / banana / grated apple (no skin)
	Chicken / vegetable / bone broth

3 Chronic diarrhoea

Consult a dietitian or your treating doctor.

4 Constipation

Some people normally go to the toilet to pass faeces 2-3 times per day. For others 2-3 times a week is normal. Constipation is a change from your usual pattern of bowel habits. Sometimes patients may experience cramping pain in the lower abdomen or feel bloated / nauseous.

5 Causes



Not eating enough fibre



Not drinking enough fluids



Lack of activity / mobility



Some pain killers, anti-acids, anti-depressants, iron tablets



Cancer affecting the bowel

6 Relieving constipation



Drink fluids – fluids with laxative effects include prune, fresh orange or grapefruit juice



Active / passive exercise



Never ignore the feeling of needing the toilet



If you're on medication that causes you to have constipation, take a laxative daily as prescribed by your doctor

7 Four groups of laxatives

Bulk-forming – Normacol, Fybogel

Stimulant – Senokot, Soflax, Dulcolax

Osmotic laxative – Movicol, Laxette

Stool softener – Liquid paraffin
