

Managing constipation

A kind and gentle guide to getting things moving again.

Constipation is incredibly common and never something to be embarrassed about. It simply means your bowels are having a hard time, and that is a signal worth listening to. The good news? Most of the time, small changes to the way you eat, drink and move can make a big difference.

You are in the driving seat of your own health and anything you do, no matter how small, is a step in the right direction.

What is constipation?

Most people open their bowels once a day, and daily movements are generally a good sign your gut is happy. Medically, constipation is defined as fewer than 3 times a week - but what matters most is a change from *your* own normal, and whether you are straining, passing hard or lumpy stools, or feeling like you haven't fully emptied. If any of those apply, your bowels are asking for a little more support.

What causes constipation?

COMMON TRIGGERS

- Not enough fibre in your diet
- Not drinking enough water
- Sitting for long periods
- Ignoring the urge to go
- Stress, anxiety or low mood
- Some medications (e.g. iron tablets, painkillers)
- Changes in routine or travel

WHO IS MORE AFFECTED

- Those with a low-fibre diet
- People who are less active
- Older adults
- During pregnancy
- People with thyroid conditions or diabetes
- Those on certain medications
- People under significant stress

The four foundations that help most

Eat More Fibre	Drink Enough Water	Keep Moving	Go When You Need To
Add fruit, veg, beans, oats & wholegrains gradually. Rushing causes bloating.	Aim for 6-8 glasses a day. Fibre needs water, without it, things get worse.	A 10-minute walk after meals helps your gut move things along.	Never ignore the urge. A footstool under your feet on the toilet helps.

Easy ways to eat more fibre

Instead of...	Try...
White bread	Wholegrain or seeded bread
White rice	Brown rice
White Pasta	Wholegrain pasta
Cornflakes	Porridge or bran flakes
Crisps	Nuts, fruit or seeds

Then build these into your daily routine.

- ✓ **Add** a handful of beans or lentils to soups/stews
- ✓ **Sprinkle** ground flaxseed on porridge or yoghurt
- ✓ **Eat** fruit with the skin on (apples, pears)
- ✓ **Add** vegetables to every meal
- ✓ **Prunes** or prune juice; nature's gentle laxative
- ✓ **Kiwi fruit** (1-2 a day) as recommended by the British Dietetic Association for constipation.
Important: some people are allergic to kiwi fruit.

Increase fibre slowly. Go too fast and you may get bloating. Drink more water as you increase fibre; they work as a team. Progress over perfection. Anything is better than nothing.

Keep reading for my constipation supplement plan →

Gentle fibre supplement plan

For those who struggle to get enough fibre from food alone, or who are sensitive to dietary changes.

Fibre supplements can be a kind, gentle stepping stone. The key is to **go slow and low**, increase your water intake, and give your gut time to adjust. Choose *one* option below - do not start both at the same time.

Before you start

Choose only one supplement. Psyllium or PHGG (not both).

Always take with a full glass of water (at least 250ml).

If you have severe pain, vomiting, a swollen tummy, cannot pass wind or a stool at all, stop and get medical help immediately.

These supplements may slow absorption of some medications. Take at least 1 hour away from other tablets.

Choose one option

Option A: Psyllium Husk

MOST EVIDENCE

WEEK	DOSE
1	3g once daily
2	3g twice daily
3	4.5g twice daily
4	6g twice daily

UK brands with third-party testing

Fybogel: From any pharmacy. NHS licensed, no prescription needed.

NKD Living: Batch-tested for heavy metals, microorganisms & 500+ pesticides.

Option B: PHGG (Guar gum)

GENTLER OPTION

WEEK	DOSE
1	2g once daily
2	3g once daily
3	3g twice daily
4	5-6g per day

UK brands with third-party testing

Nestle OptiFibre: From pharmacies - clinically proven, ACBS approved FSMP.

Healthy Origins: Uses Sunfiber PHGG - the ingredient in clinical trials.

Invivo Bio.Me: UK practitioner-grade, GMP certified, B Corp, Sunfiber AG.

How to take supplements

- ✓ Mix in water, juice or soft food.
- ✓ Take with meals where possible.
- ✓ Give each dose 5-7 days before increasing
- ✓ It may take 2-4 weeks to notice a real difference.
- ✓ Keep drinking plenty of water throughout the day.

IF YOU GET BLOATING:

Don't worry. It's common at first and usually settles.
Do not increase the dose; stay where comfortable.
Drink more water; try splitting the dose.
If psyllium causes too much bloating, try PHGG.
If it's still bad, stop and speak to your GP.

SPEAK TO YOUR GP IF:

- Constipation is new or getting worse.
- You have blood in your stool.
- You are losing weight without trying.
- You have low iron (anaemia).
- Family history of bowel cancer.
- Over 50 and constipation is new for you.
- Severe pain, vomiting or swollen tummy.
- Cannot pass wind or stool at all.

A final thought...

Laxatives: if fibre alone isn't enough, that's okay. Macrogol (Movicol/Laxido) is the most recommended laxative for adults. Your GP or pharmacist can advise.

Remember: you are always the driver of your own health.

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MEDICAL DISCLAIMER

This content is for general health information only and does not constitute personal medical advice. Please consult your GP or a qualified healthcare professional before making significant changes to your diet, exercise or health routine.

EVIDENCE BASE

Rome IV Criteria (Gastroenterology, 2016) | AGA-ACG Clinical Practice Guideline: Pharmacological Management of Chronic Constipation (Gastroenterology, 2023) | Quartarone G. Role of PHGG as a dietary fiber (2013) | Niv E et al. PHGG vs placebo in IBS (Nutrition & Metabolism, 2016) | Camilleri M et al. Chronic constipation (Nature Reviews Disease Primers, 2017).