

The Bristol-Stool Chart

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

The Bristol-Stool Chart image, created by Kyle Thompson and released under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 license

Let your nurse know:

- when you have a bowel movement
- if you feel constipated
- if your bowel pattern has changed
- if you have pain or blood with bowel movements
- if you need medicine to help you have a bowel movement

Avoiding Constipation When in Hospital

This material has been reviewed and approved by patients, families and staff.



For more copies, go online: <http://phc.eduhealth.ca>
or email: pheh@providencehealth.bc.ca
and quote catalogue no. FK.515.Av71.PHC
©Providence Health Care
www.providencehealth.bc.ca

The information in this document is intended solely for the person to whom it was given by the health care team

When people are in the hospital it is very common for them to become constipated. This means it is difficult to have a normal bowel movement. Medical treatments, some medicines and changes in your diet can all cause constipation. There are things you can do to help your bowels work normally while you are in the hospital.

Everyone's bowel movements are different. Some people have a bowel movement every three days. Other people may have a bowel movement three times each day. Ideally your bowel movements will be soft formed and easy to pass.

How do I know if I am constipated?

Constipation is a common problem that makes it difficult to have bowel movements. Your bowel movements might be:

- too hard
- too small
- hard to get out
- fewer than three times per week
- small frequent amounts of diarrhea

What is making me constipated?

- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not eating enough foods with fibre
- Not moving around enough
- Side effects of medications and medical treatment
- Various medical problems

Daily habits for regular bowel movements

1. Drink something warm or hot at breakfast time. This will encourage your bowels to move.
2. Visit the bathroom 30 minutes after breakfast.
 - Sit with feet flat on the floor
 - Lean forward slightly
 - Rest elbows or hands on your knees
 - ***Do not strain*** to have a bowel movement until you feel a good urge to empty your bowels
 - If you do not start a bowel movement after five minutes, get up and do something else. Straining for longer than five minutes can weaken your muscles and cause nerve damage.

The greatest urge to have a bowel movement usually happens in the morning after something to eat and drink. Sitting helps to empty the bowel completely.

3. Drink fluids (water, milk, juice, soup, tea, coffee) throughout the day – about six to eight cups each day. Check with your nurse if you have a fluid restriction. Fluid is absorbed into the body through the bowel. If you drink too little, you might become constipated.

4. Eat high-fibre food with your meals, like fruit and vegetables, bran, whole wheat bread, and high-fibre cereals. You can also ask your nurse for fruit lax. Fibre adds bulk to your stool and makes it easier to pass. Ask your nurse for a referral to the hospital dietitian if you want help getting more fibre in your hospital diet.

5. Get up and walk around every hour during the day if you can. If you need to, use your cane or walker. Exercise helps the bowels move regularly.

6. If you do not have a bowel movement after breakfast, sit on the toilet again after lunch and supper.

7. Make sure you use the bathroom right away when you feel the urge to have a bowel movement. Don't hold it!