

Avoiding constipation: Bristol Stool Chart



Information for patients

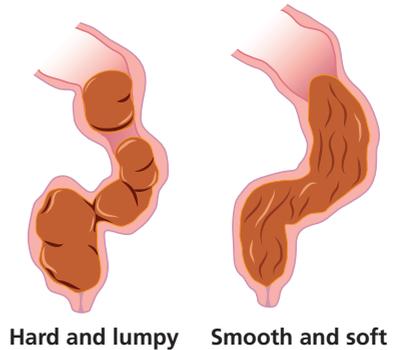
Northern General Hospital



Constipation

Constipation is a very common problem affecting about 1 in 10 people at any time. It can occur for many reasons such as:

- Not having enough fibre in your diet
- A side effect of some health conditions
- A side effect of some medicines



This leaflet is designed to tell you about laxative medication used to relieve constipation (e.g. Movicol, Laxido, Macrogol or Lactulose). By following the advice in this leaflet, you can obtain the best out of your treatment, so that you can get back to your normal routine as quickly as possible.

What is the Bristol Stool Chart?

The Bristol Stool Chart shows the consistency of different types of stools (see chart opposite). In general you will be aiming for a consistency of type 3 or 4.

What are laxatives and how do they work?

Laxatives are a form of medication which are used to help soften your stools. They work by changing the structure of the water that they are dissolved in. The change in structure means that they are not absorbed into the blood stream but instead remain in your gut. It is this water that makes your stool soft.

It is therefore important to take laxatives such as Movicol or Laxido in the correct amount of water.

The Bristol Stool Chart

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

Using the Bristol Stool Chart to manage your bowels

You should assess your stool every time you perform bowel management. Decide where on the Bristol Stool Chart you are, and adjust the dose of laxative accordingly. This will involve increasing the dose, staying on the same dose or reducing it.

What is the correct dose of laxative?

The dose you take will vary depending on where you are on the chart. This can range from 0 to 4 sachets per day.

What are the benefits of this approach?

It is advisable to use this approach to taking your laxative, as taking the same dose every day usually results in your stool becoming too soft, which makes it difficult to avoid accidents.

Using laxative in this way is an excellent method for preventing constipation. It is much better than only using laxative when you are already constipated. It also improves the function of Peristeen or Qufora (transanal irrigation); if you use this method for bowel management you can probably afford to keep your stool a little bit softer than if you rely on digital removal (manual evacuation).



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