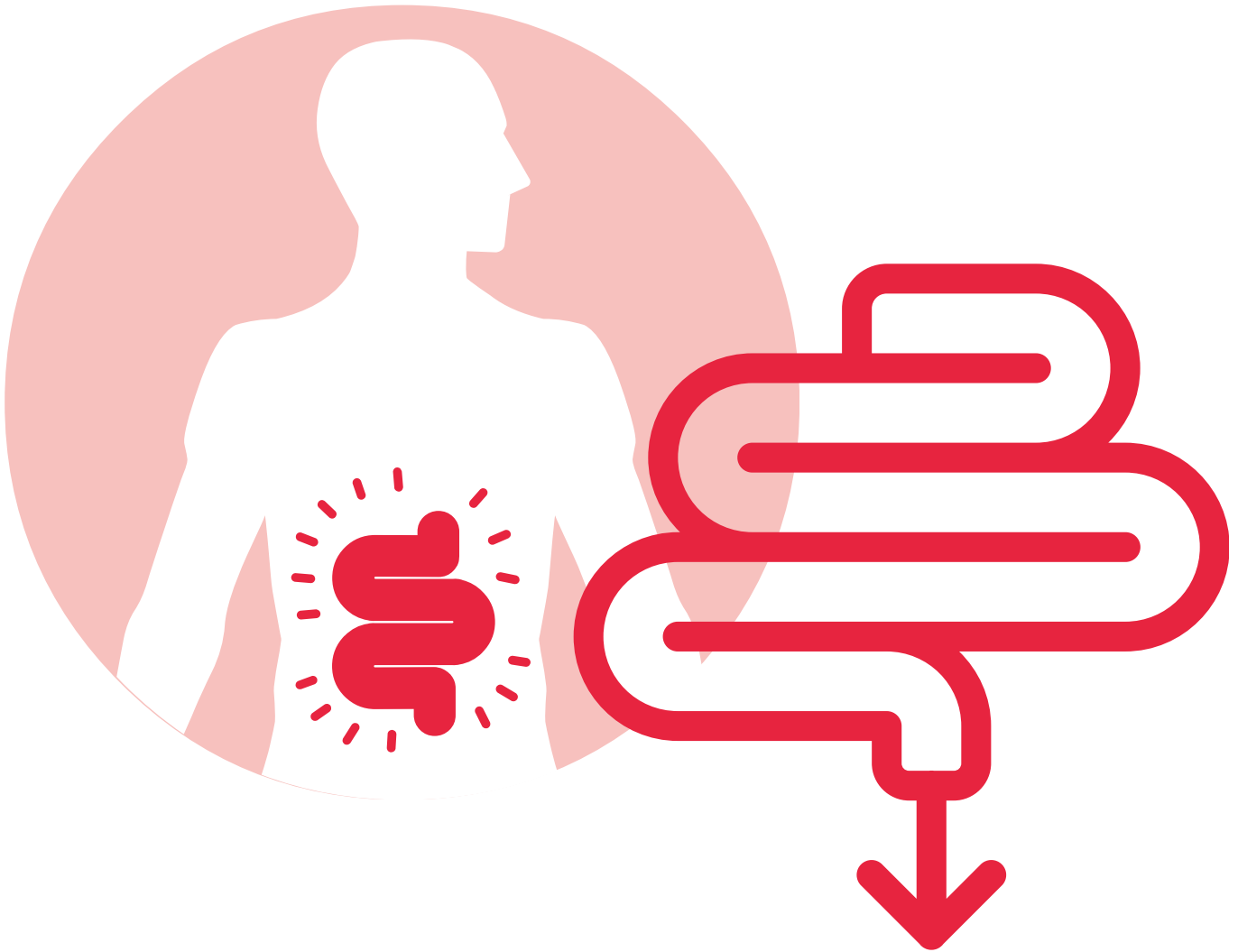


Healthy Bowels



A PRACTICAL RESOURCE TO SUPPORT HEALTHY BOWEL HABITS

Evidence-based client resource to support clinical practice

Disclaimer: No information in this guide is intended to be used or relied on as medical advice, or to diagnose, treat, or cure any medical condition. Users are responsible for making their own enquiries and should seek independent advice from a qualified healthcare professional before relying on any information provided.

Healthy Bowels

What are healthy bowels?

Healthy bowel function is about how your bowels work, not just how often you go.

Healthy bowel motions are usually:

- Soft and well-formed
- Easy to pass without straining
- Completed with a feeling of full emptying
- Not associated with pain, discomfort, or urgency
- Consistent and predictable for you over time

Healthy bowel habits can look different from one person to another.

A normal range is considered to be: **3 times per day to 3 times per week.**

Bristol Stool Chart

type 1	type 2	type 3	type 4	type 5	type 6	type 7
						
SEVERE CONSTIPATION	MILD CONSTIPATION	NORMAL	NORMAL	LACKING FIBRE	MILD DIARRHOEA	SEVERE DIARRHOEA
Separate hard lumps, like pellets (hard to pass)	Log shaped but lumpy	Like a log but with cracks on the surface	Like a log or snake, soft and smooth	Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (easy to pass)	Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool	Watery, no solid pieces, entirely liquid

If your bowel motions are consistently not Type 3 or 4, we recommend seeking advice from a healthcare practitioner.

Healthy Bowels

Factors that impact bowel movements

1

Fibre Intake



2

Fluid intake



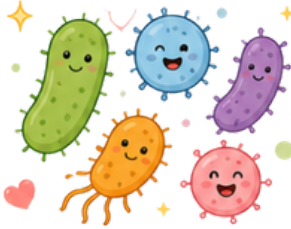
3

Toilet Routines



7

Gut Microbiota



6

Movements



5

Stress Management



4

Medications



Tip

Changes in fibre, fluid intake, mood, routines, medications, and the gut microbiota can influence your bowel movements.



Healthy Bowels

How to maintain a healthy bowel - Fibre and Fluids

1 Fibre Intake

Aim for 25–30 g of fibre each day by including a variety of vegetables, fruit, legumes, wholegrains, nuts and seeds.¹



High Fibre Foods



Kiwi fruit

2 medium (100 g) = 3.1 g



Broccoli

½ cup cooked (75 g) = 2.6 g



Lentils

½ cup cooked (75 g) = 7.5 g



Oats

½ cup dry (45 g) = 4.0 g



Berries

1 cup (150 g) = 5.0 g



Wholemeal Bread

2 slices (80 g) = 4.0 g



Almonds

Handful (30 g) = 3.8 g



Chia seeds

2 tbsp (20 g) = 6.8 g

2 Fluid Intake

Aim for approximately 8–10 cups of water each day. Drink in accordance with thirst, aiming for pale yellow urine.²



Tip

Make hydration easy:

flavour your water with fruit or citrus, enjoy a cup of tea, and keep a water bottle nearby to sip throughout the day.



References

1. National Health and Medical Research Council. Dietary fibre. Eat for Health. Accessed June 30, 2026. <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/nutrient-reference-values/nutrients/dietary-fibre>
2. National Health and Medical Research Council. Water. Eatforhealth.gov.au. Accessed June 30, 2026. <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/nutrient-reference-values/nutrients/water>

Healthy Bowels

How to maintain a healthy bowel - Toilet Routines

3 Toilet Routines

Allow enough time

Avoid rushing or straining when using the toilet, allow about 10 minutes.

Don't ignore the urge

Go to the toilet when you feel the urge to open your bowels.



Tip

Toilet habits and positioning:

A good toilet position can help make bowel movements easier, especially if you often strain or experience constipation.³



Feet on a small stool



Knees higher than hips



Lean forward, elbows on knees



Relax and breathe

References

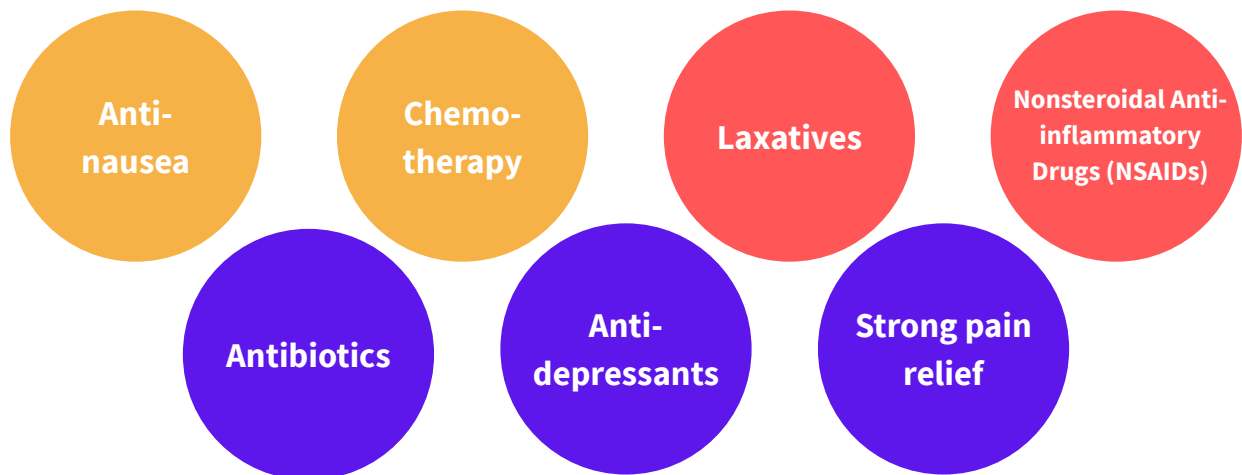
3. Savory G. 7 Toilet Positions To Relieve Constipation | Bladder & Bowel Community. Bladder & Bowel Community. Published August 10, 2021. <https://www.bladderandbowel.org/bowel/bowel-resources/toilet-positions/>

Healthy Bowels

How to maintain a healthy bowel - Medications

4 Medications

Some medications and supplements can affect bowel movements. They may slow down how quickly stool moves through the gut, make stools harder to pass, or sometimes cause looser stools or diarrhoea.⁴



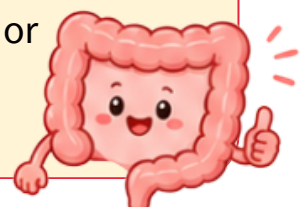
Effects on bowel movements: **Constipation** **Diarrhoea** **Both**



Tip When to seek advice?

If you notice changes in your bowel habits after starting a new medication or supplement, speak with your doctor or pharmacist. This is especially important if constipation, diarrhoea, bloating or stomach discomfort is affecting your daily life, appetite, or energy levels.

Do not stop or change prescribed medications without medical advice. A health professional may be able to review your medications, suggest timing adjustments, recommend suitable bowel support strategies, or provide safe treatment options if needed.



References

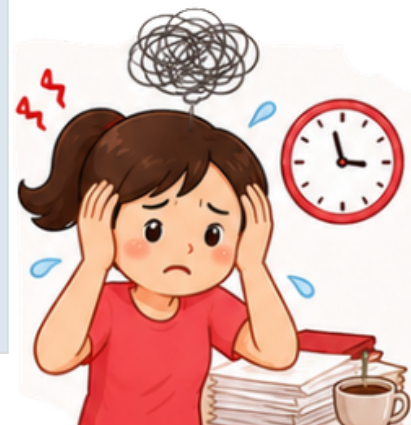
4. Philpott HL, Nandurkar S, Lubel J, Gibson PR. Drug-induced gastrointestinal disorders. Postgrad Med J. 2014;90(1065):411-419. doi:10.1136/postgradmedj-2013-100316rep

Healthy Bowels

How to maintain a healthy bowel - Stress Management

5 Stress Management

The gut and brain are closely connected through the gut-brain axis. When you feel stressed, anxious or overwhelmed, you might experience constipation, diarrhoea, bloating, cramping, or urgency.



Constipation



Diarrhoea



Bloating



Cramping



Urgency

Ways to manage stress



Breathing exercise



Regular Movement



Balanced diet



Consistent sleep routine

About IBS

The gut-brain axis can be disrupted in irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). In IBS, the nerves that control digestion can become more sensitive. Stress is one of the most common triggers of IBS symptoms.⁵



Tip

When to seek advice?

Speak to a health professional if symptoms persistent, worsening, or affecting your daily activities.



Healthy Bowels

How to maintain a healthy bowel - Movements

6 Movements

Regular physical activity can support healthy bowel movements by helping the muscles in the gut move stool through the bowel.⁶

Recommendation

Aim for at least 20-30 minutes of physical activity each day to support healthy bowel function.⁷



Ways to improve physical activity



Short walk after meals



Gentle stretching



Active breaks from sitting



Cycling



Swimming



Body weight movements

Aim to move your body most days in a way that feels safe and manageable for you.

References

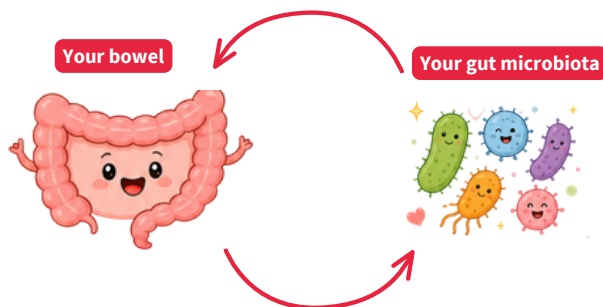
6. Cui J, Xie F, Yue H, Xie C, Ma J, Han H, et al. Physical activity and constipation: a systematic review of cohort studies. J Glob Health. 2024;14:04197. doi:10.7189/jogh.14.04197
7. Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Aging. 24-hour movement guidelines for all Australians. Published March 16, 2026. <https://www.health.gov.au/topics/physical-activity/24-hour-movement-guidelines-for-all-australians?language=en>

Healthy Bowels

How to maintain a healthy bowel - Gut Microbiota

7 Gut Microbiota

Your bowel movements can also be influenced by your gut microbiota, which is the community of microorganisms living in your gut. While this is still an emerging area of research, studies have explored how gut bacteria and their by-products may play a role in stool consistency and gut motility.



How gut microbiota may influence gut motility?^{8,9}

Fibre fermentation



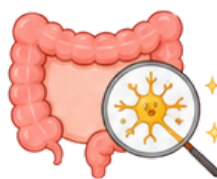
Some bacteria breakdown fibre.

Short-chain fatty acids



This produces short-chain fatty acids such as butyrate.

Gut signalling



These compounds may affect gut nerve signalling and serotonin release.

Motility and secretion



This may influence bowel motility, inflammation, bile acid, water and electrolyte movement.

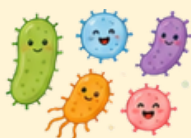
What are prebiotics, probiotics, and synbiotics?

Prebiotics



Fibres or substrates used by beneficial microorganisms.

Probiotics



Living microorganisms when consumed in adequate amounts provide a health benefit to the host.

Synbiotics



A combination of prebiotics and probiotics.

A probiotic example

Yakult contains the unique probiotic, *Lactobacillus paracasei* Shirota (LcS) strain, which is shown to survive and reach the intestines alive, alter and increase the number of beneficial bacteria, and encourages regular bowel movements by improving stool consistency.¹¹



Probiotic effects are strain specific, so results for one strain cannot be applied to all probiotics.

Research suggested these may help stool frequency and consistency, but effects vary based on the type, the bacteria strain, dose, duration, and person.¹⁰

References

- Reigstad CS, Salmonson CE, Rainey JF, et al. Gut microbes promote colonic serotonin production through an effect of short-chain fatty acids on enterochromaffin cells. *The FASEB Journal*. 2015;29(4):1395-1403. doi:https://doi.org/10.1096/fj.14-259598
- Facchin S, Bertin L, Bonazzi E, et al. Short-Chain Fatty Acids and Human Health: From Metabolic Pathways to Current Therapeutic Implications. *Life*. 2024;14(5):559-559. doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/life14050559
- Ding F, Hu M, Ding Y, et al. Efficacy in bowel movement and change of gut microbiota on adult functional constipation patients treated with probiotics-containing products: a systematic review and meta-analysis *BMJ Open* 2024;14:e074557. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2023-074557
- Matsumoto K, Takada T, Shimizu K, et al. Effects of a probiotic fermented milk beverage containing *Lactobacillus casei* strain Shirota on defecation frequency, intestinal microbiota, and the intestinal environment of healthy individuals with soft stools. *J Biosci Bioeng*. 2010; 110(5):547-52.

7-Day Bowel Diary

Fill this once a day and use the Bristol Stool Chart below for your stool type.

	Date / Time	Bowel movement	Bristol stool type (1-7)	Straining	Symptoms (✓ all that apply)	Fibre / Fluids / Movement (✓ each)	Stress	Medications / Notes
Monday 	___ / ___ _____	☐ Yes ☐ No		☐ None ☐ A little ☐ A lot	☐ Bloating ☐ Pain ☐ Urgency	 ☐  ☐  ☐	☐ Good ☐ Okay ☐ Poor	
Tuesday 	___ / ___ _____	☐ Yes ☐ No		☐ None ☐ A little ☐ A lot	☐ Bloating ☐ Pain ☐ Urgency	 ☐  ☐  ☐	☐ Good ☐ Okay ☐ Poor	
Wednesday 	___ / ___ _____	☐ Yes ☐ No		☐ None ☐ A little ☐ A lot	☐ Bloating ☐ Pain ☐ Urgency	 ☐  ☐  ☐	☐ Good ☐ Okay ☐ Poor	
Thursday 	___ / ___ _____	☐ Yes ☐ No		☐ None ☐ A little ☐ A lot	☐ Bloating ☐ Pain ☐ Urgency	 ☐  ☐  ☐	☐ Good ☐ Okay ☐ Poor	
Friday 	___ / ___ _____	☐ Yes ☐ No		☐ None ☐ A little ☐ A lot	☐ Bloating ☐ Pain ☐ Urgency	 ☐  ☐  ☐	☐ Good ☐ Okay ☐ Poor	
Saturday 	___ / ___ _____	☐ Yes ☐ No		☐ None ☐ A little ☐ A lot	☐ Bloating ☐ Pain ☐ Urgency	 ☐  ☐  ☐	☐ Good ☐ Okay ☐ Poor	
Sunday 	___ / ___ _____	☐ Yes ☐ No		☐ None ☐ A little ☐ A lot	☐ Bloating ☐ Pain ☐ Urgency	 ☐  ☐  ☐	☐ Good ☐ Okay ☐ Poor	

type 1  SEVERE CONSTIPATION Separate hard lumps, like pellets (hard to pass)	type 2  MILD CONSTIPATION Log shaped but lumpy	type 3  NORMAL Like a log but with cracks on the surface	type 4  NORMAL Like a log or snake, soft and smooth	type 5  LACKING FIBRE Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (easy to pass)	type 6  MILD DIARRHOEA Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool	type 7  SEVERE DIARRHOEA Watery, no solid pieces, entirely liquid
---	--	--	---	---	---	---

A bowel diary can help you and your healthcare professional understand your bowel pattern and possible targets.