

Tips to help you when opening your bowel

USING THE GASTRO-COLIC REFLEX

It is important to eat regular meals as the stretch placed on the stomach with the ingestion of food stimulates the bowel and increases the movement of stool through the bowel. This is called the gastro-colic reflex. The strongest gastro-colic reflex we experience is first thing in the morning as the bowel has slowed down overnight; eating breakfast will help to kick-start the bowel. Hot drinks may also be helpful.

Bowels respond well to routine so try to empty your bowels at a **regular time** each day. To utilise the gastro-colic reflex this may mean going to sit on the toilet up to 30 minutes **after eating breakfast** (and perhaps after lunch and/or dinner depending on your individual bowel habit).

To take full advantage of this bowel reflex, eat **regular meals** and **try to not skip any meals** (particularly breakfast); **make time** to go to the toilet and try to get into a regular routine.

- **Don't rush** on the toilet and try to avoid interruptions where possible. But do only take as long as you need – if you have not gone within 10 minutes, it may be unlikely that your bowels are going to move at that time. So wait and try again after your next meal or hot drink.
- Where possible, **act on the first urge** to open your bowels. Delaying it for long periods of time can cause the stool to become harder as water is absorbed out of the stool.

THINK ABOUT HOW YOU SIT ON THE TOILET – A SQUATTING POSITION IS IDEAL

- Raise your knees higher than your hips by placing your feet flat on a foot rest – this could be a step or upturned washing-up bowl.
- Have your feet hip-width apart – this will help to widen your pelvis and encourage relaxation of the pelvic floor muscles.
- Lean forwards, resting your forearms on your knees, keeping your back straight. Relax your shoulders, arms, stomach and legs.
- Keep your mouth and pelvic floor soft and relaxed.

