

Bowel Habit

What is a good bowel habit?

Bowel habit is the term used for how often you have bowel movements. There is no "best" number of daily or weekly bowel movements. Some people have a bowel movement twice a day and others twice a week. What's more important than having frequent bowel movements is having regular and soft bowel movements. Your bowel habit is good as long as the frequency of your bowel movements stays about the same and your stools are soft enough to pass without straining.

Most people have temporary changes in their bowel habit, such as diarrhea or constipation, from time to time. For example, many people notice that some foods, like nuts and corn, make their bowel movements loose. These temporary changes usually are not a sign of a serious medical problem. However, a change in bowel habit that does not go away may be a sign of a problem.

How do bowel habits change as I get older?

As you get older, you are more likely to have constipation.

- As your lifestyle changes, your diet may change. You may have less fiber in your food or simply not eat as much as you used to.
- You may drink less fluid and get less exercise.
- You may take medicine that can cause constipation.
- If you have been using a laxative often, it may cause constipation when you stop using it.

What are the symptoms of a possibly serious problem?

Symptoms that may signal a problem include:

- Any change in normal bowel habits that lasts for 2 weeks or more
- A change in the texture of stools, for example, stools that are much harder or looser
- A change in the color of stools, for example, much paler or very dark
- Stools that are narrower than before and stay that way for 2 to 4 weeks
- Bowel movements that float and look fatty or greasy
- Bowel movements that are painful or hard to pass
- Stomach cramps, pain, bloating, and no bowel movement for more than 3 or 4 days (normal frequency ranges from 3 a day to 1 every 3 days)
- Blood in the stools, on your clothes, or on toilet paper

If you have one or more of these changes and they do not go away, tell your healthcare provider.

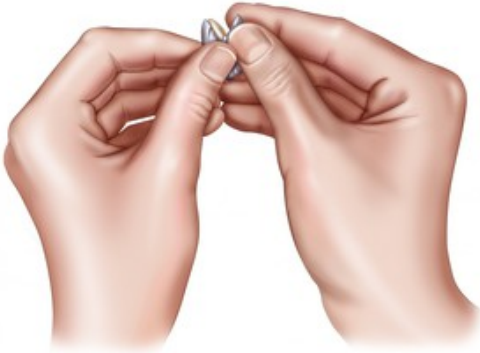
How can I take care of myself?

- Check your diet. In general, try to increase your fiber and vegetables and drink fluids.
 - You can increase your fiber by eating 2 cups of fruit, 2 and 1/2 cups of vegetables, and at least 3 servings of whole-grain breads and cereals each day. Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day
 - Eat 14 grams of fiber for every 1000 calories every day. This is lots of fiber! Work up to this amount over a month, adding more fiber every couple of days. If you don't have that much appetite, try fiber supplement capsules containing psyllium, bran, or methylcellulose. There are many brands.
- Reestablish or keep a regular bowel habit. Many people feel better if they go to the bathroom about the same time each day. Other people feel better just going whenever they feel the need.
- A fiber laxative such as Metamucil is often helpful for a more regular bowel habit. Follow the directions for taking the laxative carefully.
- Be sure you get some exercise every day. For example, walk at least a mile every day. If you have joints that hurt, try exercising in a swimming pool instead.
- Using a suppository once in a while can help to stimulate the bowel movement. Do not use laxatives on a daily basis.
- Some medicines can cause diarrhea or constipation. Ask your healthcare provider to review your medicines.
- If you have followed these recommendations and you are still concerned about your bowel habit, consult your healthcare provider in case there is a more serious underlying cause.

Developed by RelayHealth.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

How to Insert a Rectal Suppository



1. Remove foil wrapper.

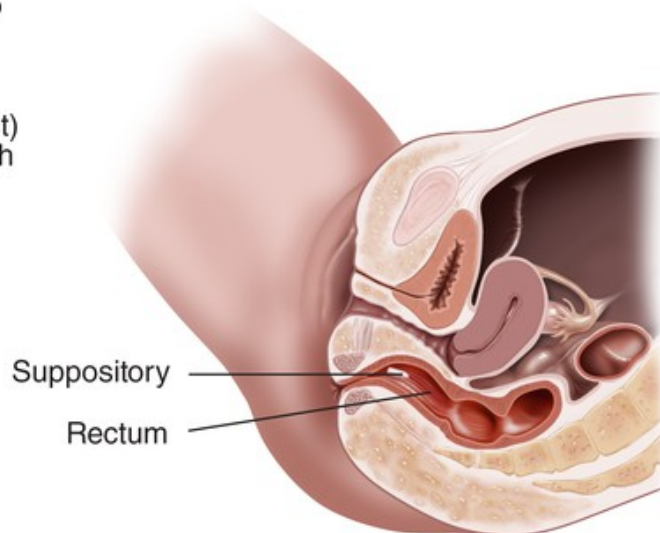


2. Moisten the suppository with water or water-based lubricating jelly (such as K-Y).



3. Lie on your left side and bend your right knee up towards your chest. Gently push the suppository into your rectum (pointed end first) so that it is deep enough not to come out. Keep lying down for about 5 minutes.

Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist if you should wear gloves when you insert a suppository.



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