

Eating After Bowel Surgery

This factsheet describes how and why your bowel habits change following surgery, which foods can help your bowel movements and some possible options for medication. If you would like further information or have any concerns, please call our **Bowel Cancer Advisory Service on freephone 0800 8 40 35 40**.

It is not unusual to experience a change in your normal bowel habit after the removal of a part of your large bowel (colon). This is because part of the function of the bowel is to remove water from the liquid waste as it is processed, which in turn has an effect on the consistency and regularity with which you pass stools (poo). Therefore, when a portion of the bowel is removed during surgery there is less travel time and a smaller area in which this process occurs and the resulting stools are passed with more liquid.

It is important to be aware that this change usually settles with time but can take several months.

Initially, you may also find that some foods or food groups do not now agree with you and you develop diarrhoea as a result. Try to reintroduce these foods to your diet a little at a time. If they cause severe reactions you may wish to avoid them altogether. It can be helpful to eat low fibre foods for a short time. White bread, pasta, plain boiled rice or plain yoghurts are all examples of low fibre foods. Foods that will help thicken the bulk of your stools include mashed potato smooth peanut butter, apples, pears, ripe bananas and gelatine (a natural product found in marshmallows, jellies and mousses).

Some dietary tips which may help

- Drink plenty of fluids, particularly water, to replace water loss (at least 10-12 cups/glasses per day)
- Drink caffeine (coffee, tea, fizzy drinks) in moderation. Caffeine is dehydrating and can also stimulate the bowels and worsen diarrhoea
- Eat small, frequent and regular meals
- Avoid missing meals
- Chew food slowly
- Avoid fruit and vegetables with high fibre or remove the skin to reduce fibre

It is very important that you have a well-balanced and nutritious diet. If you would like further advice, your GP can refer you to a community dietician.

Treatment options

It is possible to take some medication that will help slow your bowel actions, allowing more fluid to be absorbed from the digested food. This will make your stools firmer and reduce the number of times that you have to go to the toilet.

Your GP will be able to recommend an appropriate medication for you. Some examples of medications that might be recommended are:

- Loperamide/Imodium
- Lomotil
- Codeine phosphate
- Fybogel

It is necessary to take such medication regularly (not just after passing a loose stool) in order to control the symptoms but medication should only be taken long-term under the instruction of your doctor.

If your bowel habit changes again after settling into a new pattern following surgery, you should contact your GP.

You may find the following additional factsheets helpful:

- Staying Healthy After Bowel Cancer
- Going Home

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