

# Healthy Digestion

An easy-read booklet



# Common digestive problems and how to treat them



Digestive complaints such as constipation, diarrhoea, heartburn and bloating are very common.



These problems are usually treatable by changing what you eat and non-prescription medicines.



Most digestive problems are to do with lifestyle, the foods you eat, or stress.



Taking steps to change your lifestyle can help, and often stop many of these problems.

# Common digestive problems and how to treat them



**Some medicines that your doctor may have prescribed for you can lead to side effects that may upset your tummy.**



**These medicines can cause indigestion, diarrhoea or constipation.**



**Always tell your doctor if your prescribed medicines are upsetting your tummy.**

# Common digestive problems



Digestive symptoms are usually harmless and often settle down by themselves, but sometimes they do not go away and can be a sign of serious illness.



If you have taken medicine and the problem has not gone away in 2 weeks, go and see your doctor.

If you have any of the following symptoms, you should see a doctor straight away.

Losing weight



Losing weight quickly



A sudden change in how often you go to the toilet



Bleeding from your bottom



Difficulty swallowing



Unable to go to the toilet



Constant Diarrhoea



**Reflux** (a burning feeling in your throat after eating)



**A constant pain in your stomach that doesn't go away**

## Good ways to help your digestion



It's a good idea to try to eat more fibre, as most people don't get enough. A diet with lots of fibre can help digestion and prevent constipation.



Eating too much of the wrong food too often could cause digestion problems. Here's a tummy-friendly diet to aim for.

**To stay healthy, you need fibre from a variety of sources, such as:**



**Brown bread and brown rice**



**Fruit and vegetables**



**Cereals and oats**



**Beans**



# Good ways to help your digestion

## Tip 1. Drink plenty of fluids



It's important to keep drinking, especially water. It may be a good idea to buy a reusable water bottle and take it with you when you are out and about.



A good way to make sure you're getting enough fluids is to drink a glass of water with every meal.

## Tip 2. Cut down on fat



Fatty foods, such as chips, burgers and fried foods are harder to digest and can cause stomach pain and heartburn.

### Grill ✓



Try to eat more lean meat and fish and grill rather than fry foods.

# Good ways to help your digestion

## Tip 3. Go easy on spice to avoid tummy troubles



Many people love spicy food and it doesn't bother their digestive system. Others find their tummy is upset when they have spicy food.



It's not just hot foods like chillies that trigger heartburn. Milder but flavourful foods like garlic and onion can also bring it on.



If spicy foods give you heartburn, stomach pain or diarrhoea, try to eat them less often. If you already have a problem like heartburn or an irritable bowel, avoid them completely.

## Tip 4. Choose the right drinks to ease digestion



Coffee, colas, tea and some fizzy drinks have caffeine in them which boosts acid in the stomach. This can lead to heartburn.

# Good ways to help your digestion



Fizzy drinks in general tend to bloat the tummy, which can also lead to heartburn.



To make digestive problems less likely, choose drinks that aren't fizzy and don't contain caffeine, such as herbal teas, milk and plain water.

## Tip 5. Using Probiotics



Probiotics are so-called "friendly bacteria" that also occur naturally in the gut and have been linked to all sorts of digestive health benefits.



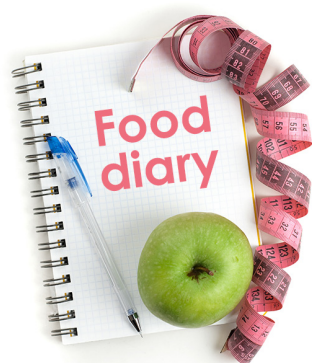
They take a while to work. You will need to take them every day for at least 4 weeks to see if they help you.



# Good ways to help your digestion



Try to stay away from foods and drinks that trigger your digestive symptoms.

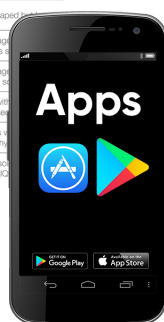


One way to work out which foods cause your symptoms is to keep a food diary.

## The Bristol Stool Chart

Adapted from the Bristol Stool Scale (Heaton et al 1990)

Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
Type 2		Sausage-shaped
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on its surface
Type 4		Like a sausage but smooth and shiny
Type 5		Soft blobs with flat edges (passed easily)
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, mushy
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces, ENTIRELY LIQUID



A good way to keep track of your health is to keep a bowel chart. These can either be done on paper or using an app on your phone or tablet.



'Poop Tracker - Toilet Log' is a useful and simple App to try. It is free and available on the App Store and Google Play.

# Primary Care Accessible Resources

## Resource 7: Healthy Digestion

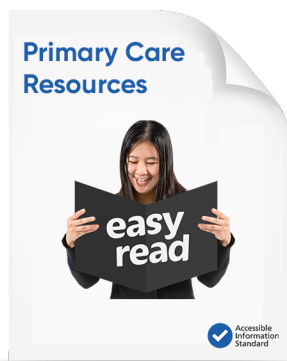
Suffolk Learning  
Disability Partnership



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This booklet is **Resource 7** and forms part of a number of projects that help to explain things about primary care services.



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