

Heathgate Medical Practice Self-care leaflet – Constipation

This range of leaflets created by our clinical team provide useful information on a range of conditions that can in most cases be managed by patients at home. Where symptoms persist after a period of self-care or after advice from the local pharmacist, you should consider calling the surgery.

Constipation means going to the toilet less frequently than usual or passing stool (faeces) which is hard and difficult to pass. This may cause pain, tummy cramps or bloating.

Constipation is common. It is estimated that 2 out of 10 people are suffering with it at any one time. It is usually harmless and symptoms are short lived, lasting a few days to 2 to 3 weeks.

How can I help myself if I have constipation?

Some of the simplest things to help with constipation are:

- To increase fluid intake. Drink plenty of water. Dehydration is one of the most common causes of constipation.
- Increase your dietary intake of fibre. Increase the proportion of fruit, vegetables, cereals, seeds and pulses in your diet.
- Go to the toilet when you need to rather than delaying the urge to open your bowels.

You can also consider laxative medications which include:

- Bulk forming agents which add fibre to the bowel such as Fybogel
- Bowel stimulants such as Senna or Bisacodyl
- Stool softeners such as Lactulose, Macrogol or Docusate

These and other ranges of medications are available from a local pharmacy and the pharmacist will be able to provide you with advice as to the most appropriate one for your personal situation.

When should I seek advice from a healthcare professional?

After the self-care advice above, you should seek advice when:

- Your stomach feels increasingly bloated and you start to vomit.
- You notice blood in your stool.
- You have other symptoms such as weight loss, which is not intentional or you feel unwell.
- You think any other regular medication prescribed by your doctor is making you feel constipated.

Further advice on constipation is available at www.nhs.uk