

Norfolk Physiology Unit
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Biofeedback/Bowel Retraining – Information for Patients

Please make sure you understand and follow these instructions carefully, otherwise your test may need to be postponed and a new appointment arranged. Please be aware this causes delays for other patients. If you need to cancel your appointment, please give as much notice as possible so we can offer your appointment to another patient.

Biofeedback / Bowel Retraining

You will have recently attended for an outpatient appointment with problems associated with incomplete emptying of the back passage or constipation or both symptoms either in the Outpatient Department or at the Norfolk Physiology Unit.

You may have already had Anorectal Physiology tests in our department, or may be asked to attend for them.

Constipation is the infrequent passage of dry hard stool (faeces) or a need to strain excessively to open your bowels or both.

Some causes of constipation are:

Rectocele:

A pouch can develop in the rectal wall where stool can get trapped and makes an effective bowel movement difficult. This can lead to straining with bowel movements.

Some medications:

E.g. painkillers containing codeine can cause constipation.

Slow Transit:

This is when the gut slows down and faeces are delivered to the back passage at a reduced rate.

Eating Habits:

A regular eating habit helps promote a regular bowel action. Disturbances of eating habits can alter bowel actions (different food etc. on holiday is an example).

Lifestyle and bowel habits:

- If you do not eat regularly and drink plenty of fluid then this can lead to constipation. Also if you put off having a bowel movement, and delay this process, it can lead to reduced sensation in the back passage and could slow down your digestion. Regular exercise, where possible, can help achieve a regular bowel function.

Psychological disturbances

- Constipation is common in patients who have experienced major stressful events in their lives. This might be the death of a loved one, change of job, moving house or almost anything else that can lead to depression or anxiety.

A fear of pain:

Pain on passing a stool can lead to constipation. This pain may be the result of a fissure (split in the anal lining) or haemorrhoids (piles), which can usually be easily treated – but the fear of pain (and hence constipation) can persist.

Biofeedback/Bowel Retraining.

Biofeedback is a bowel retraining programme run by Clinical Physiologists. The appointment will last about an hour and in this time the cause and possible ways to relieve your incomplete emptying episodes or constipation symptoms will be discussed and you will be given advice on diet and toilet habits. A brief rectal examination will be required and, if necessary, a gentle enema may be offered to empty the back passage. Patients are shown how the muscles and nerves can be retrained to co-ordinate and produce a satisfactory effort to empty the bowel; a small balloon, placed in the back passage for a few minutes, is used to help achieve this. The therapy may involve a few one to one sessions between the patient and Physiologist.

This technique takes time and practice and cannot be learned overnight. What you practice at home is equally as important as what you learn at your appointment – ‘practice makes perfect’! You may need a few appointments to learn this technique.

As well as toilet posture you will receive advice on insoluble and soluble fibre as well as liquid intake and what fluids to drink.

These clinics are usually run on a one to one basis. If you would like a chaperone to be present then please ring and ask for one a few days before your appointment.

If you have any questions or concerns about your appointment, please telephone us on 01603 288281 between 0730-1600 hours.

