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WHEN BOWEL MOTIONS GET TOO SOFT

Constipation because of hard stools is a common problem. The benefits of increasing dietary fibre to soften the stool are well known.

Sometimes the stool can be too soft. The consequences include powerful and distressing urges to pass gas, or to have a bowel action. This can be embarrassing and even result in episodes of incontinence. Equally upsetting are the difficulties in completing a bowel action. This may result in soiling or incontinence immediately after a bowel action, or in perianal itching and burning discomfort.

If you have these symptoms, and your motions are soft and frequent, you may benefit from a more solid stool consistency.

How can I make my bowel motions more solid?

The most obvious way is to reduce the food and drink that makes stools softer and to replace it with food that does not. This includes:-

1. **Vegetables.** All vegetables tend to make motions softer, more frequent and make gas. Capsicum, cabbage, brussel sprouts, onions, beans and broccoli have the most potent effect. Potato and pumpkin appear to have the least effect.
2. **Fruit.** Fruits tend to have the same effect. Stone (apricots, plums, peaches) and dried (prunes and sultanas) fruits have the worst effect.
3. **Other fibre.** Extra dietary fibre may not be required if the stools are already soft. Extra fibre makes more gas.
4. **Spices.** Spices, like curry, have a potent effect on the bowel. Less obvious spices (garlic, nutmeg, cinnamon) may also have such an effect.
5. **Caffeine.** Caffeine is a well known stimulant of the intestinal tract and contributes to a loose bowel habit. It is present in coffee, tea and many cola's.
6. **Beer.** This has a marked effect on bowel consistency secondary to the volume, yeast and cereal. Spirits and wine have less effect.
7. **Meals.** Eat small meals more frequently. Separate liquids from solid foods. This will reduce bowel contractions.

Dietary advice needs to be applied with a large 'serving' of common sense. Step wise reductions are the best way to approach. Radical changes are unlikely to be sustainable.

In some situations anti-diarrhoeal medication may be necessary. Loperamide (Imodium or Gastrostop) has a potent effect, but is barely absorbed into the bloodstream. There is no tendency to develop tolerance or addiction. Other anti-diarrhoeal medications (codeine) may produce sedation and give pain relief, but are also addictive. They are not usually first choice.

The exact combination of diet, fluid and drugs that suits you can only be determined by experimenting with different combinations. By definition, experiments may go wrong. You

should not be afraid to try different combinations in order to find the one that suits you best.