

# Lifestyle Modification

## What Makes Symptoms Worse?

If you have looser stools, faecal urgency, and faecal incontinence, then please be aware that smoking can make these symptoms worse. In addition, anxiety and stress can often cause stools to move rapidly through your body. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) or self-help techniques (e.g. mindfulness) are very effective at reducing bowel symptoms associated with stress.

## The Holding-On Programme

The “Holding-On Programme” is a technique whereby you “hold on” when you experience faecal urgency. By squeezing your pelvic floor muscles, you can slowly increase the amount of time you have to get to the toilet safely.

**Initially, start with holding on for a few seconds the next time you need to empty your bowels.** Gradually increase how long you can hold on and thereby regain greater control of faecal urgency and faecal incontinence. When using this technique, try to hold on with a mild, gentle squeeze. Many people are surprised that this works better than a strong squeeze. A strong squeeze will fatigue quickly whereas a gentle squeeze can keep going for longer.

## Altering Your Position on the Toilet

**If you tend towards constipation, or obstructed defecation, then altering your position on the toilet seat can be useful.**

- Sit fully on the toilet (do not ‘hover’).
- Place your feet apart and raised-up on a stool/ support. Experiment with how far apart you need to have your feet. Some people prefer to have them quite far apart, depending on their height and build. *To achieve this, it might be useful to take your underwear down past your knees – or even take them off entirely.*
- Bend forwards and rest your arms comfortably on your legs. Try not to slump entirely, keep your head facing forward rather than down. This maintains a gentle curve in the base of your spine.
- Keep your tummy and abdominal muscles relaxed. Relax your breathing and avoid holding your breath.
- Relax your mouth and jaw muscles.
- A slight bearing down will help the stool to open the back passage for the bowel movement to come out.



## Pressure Application

**Women may find it helpful to use their fingers to apply pressure to empty the bowels more fully and effectively.** Some women support the perineum (the area of skin between the anus and the vagina). Other women find it more useful to apply pressure just inside the vagina, pushing towards the back passage.