

‘Holding on’ programme

Currently when you need to have your bowels open you find that you have to rush to the toilet. Your rectum (where you store the stool), your sphincter muscles, and your confidence need retraining to help you overcome this problem.

Next time you need to open your bowels:

1. Sit on the toilet and hold on for as long as you can before opening your bowels. If you can only manage a few seconds, don't worry, it will gradually get easier. Whatever time you can manage now, your aim is to gradually increase this. It is useful to have a watch or clock near the toilet so you can time yourself.

Gradually increase this to five minutes. Don't worry if you're not able to do this for the first few times but keep practising.

2. When you have mastered this, repeat the process above but gradually increase the time until you can hold on for 10 minutes before opening your bowels. It may be helpful to take something to read with you. This stage is harder but remember you're on the toilet and therefore "safe".
3. Once you are able to delay opening your bowels for 10 minutes while sitting on the toilet, then you can begin to move away from the toilet. At this stage, when you want to open your bowels, sit near the toilet, either on the edge of the bath or on a chair inside or just outside the toilet area. Now hold on for five minutes. Once you are able to do this, repeat the exercise, increasing to 10 minutes.
4. When you are able to delay opening your bowels for 10 minutes while off the toilet, you should gradually move further away, for example maybe sitting on the bed in your bedroom. As your muscles are now becoming stronger you should be able to hold on for 10 minutes. As you feel more confident, increase the distance between you and the toilet.

Gradually, you will find that you can increase the distance and the time away from the toilet. This may take some time to master. The more you are able to practise your sphincter exercises and the 'holding on' programme, the more quickly this will happen.

References

Norton, C. and Chelvanayagam, S. (2004) Bowel Continence Nursing, Beaconsfield: Beaconsfield Publishers Ltd, Chapter 12, p.118, Table 12:2

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