

## Third and fourth degree tears: advice for opening your bowels








After third and fourth degree tears it is particularly important that you have formed but soft bowel movements (stools). Type 3-4 (see chart below) is the recommended consistency of stool. If your stools are too loose (Type 5-6), they may be difficult to control. If your stools are too hard (Type 1-2), they can be painful and difficult to pass and could potentially cause further damage.

You will be provided with laxatives to help your stools to be soft and easy to pass. We recommend you have a good, varied and healthy diet with plenty of fluid and fibre, including fruit and vegetables.

The diagram overleaf demonstrates the correct position for opening your bowels. It shows the use of a footstool so that your knees are slightly higher than your hips. You may also find it helpful and more comfortable to apply a gentle, upwards pressure externally over the perineum (between the vagina and the back passage), using a pad of toilet paper to support the stitches.

At 10 days after having your baby your midwife will advise you to start weaning off your laxatives, unless she has any concerns about your healing. Once you have been discharged from the midwife, please make an appointment with your GP if you have any concerns about how your tear is healing.

### THE BRISTOL STOOL FORM SCALE

Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
Type 2		Sausage-shaped but lumpy
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on its surface
Type 4		Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
Type 5		Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (passed easily)
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces ENTIRELY LIQUID

# Correct position for opening your bowels

## Step one



Knees higher than hips

## Step two



Lean forwards and put elbows on your knees

## Step three



Bulge out your abdomen  
Straighten your spine

## Correct position



Knees higher than hips  
Lean forwards and put elbows on your knees  
Bulge out your abdomen  
Straighten your spine

## Physiotherapy Services Patient Information

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### References

Norton, C. and Chelvanayagam, S. (2004) Bowel Continence Nursing, Beaconsfield Publishers Ltd, Beaconsfield, Bucks.

### Further information

Other help and information can be found at The Bladder and Bowel Foundation:  
[www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org](http://www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org).

### Contact details

#### Women's Health Team

Tel: 01202 442506

Monday-Friday 8am-4pm

For further general health-related information, please ask the relevant department for an Information Prescription or contact:

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