

Approaching your GP

Bowel Advice Sheet: What to expect, and tests they may recommend

It is never too late to get help with your bowel problems. You should certainly seek help if your bowel health affects the quality of your day-to-day life, for example, by making it hard for you to:

- Travel freely, making it necessary for you to identify every accessible toilet around the area you want to visit in town
- Making social occasions difficult to attend
- Getting in the way of your work or daily commitments

Generally your first contact should be your GP, but it is possible to consult your local continence advisor without referral. Please contact our office to find out where your nearest clinic is, by visiting our [website](#).

Your First Appointment

At your first meeting with a healthcare professional about your continence problems, you will be asked to explain your bowel functions in some detail; this helps to identify and start to diagnose your problems. It is useful to keep a bowel diary for a week or so before your appointment to record things such as how many times you go to the toilet, any accidents you have and what you eat or drink.



Bowel Diary Template

This bowel diary is a useful tool and may help your GP or continence advisor understand your symptoms or condition and is available from our website - download it [here](#).

When you visit the doctor, talk about your symptoms; try to explain if you are feeling any pain, and explain the sensations you feel when you go to the toilet.

- Do you have problems with urgency?
- Do you need to go to the toilet often?
- Do you make it to the toilet in time?



Provider of the Original Just Can't Wait Card

Website: www.bladderandbowel.org | Email: help@bladderandbowel.org

It might also be helpful to tell your doctor about how your problems affect your quality of life. Think about your mental health as well as your physical health:

- Does your problem affect your relationships and social life, for instance do you have to carry spare underwear around with you?
- Have your problems affected your work or career?
- Have your problems affected your mental health and self-esteem?
- Do you feel depressed because of your problems?
- Does your problem prevent you from going out at all?

Support During the Appointment

If you have any questions to ask your doctor or continence advisor, try and write them down before your appointment and bring them with you. Write down any answers that you are given in your appointment, or ask someone to help you with this.

You may wish to bring a friend or companion along, to give you courage, to help you remember what was said and done, take notes for you, and to act as a chaperone during any physical examination that the doctor has to make. You can request a chaperone if you prefer not to have your companion in the room at this time - this is your right.

Understanding your Bowel History

Your doctor will want to know the history of your problems and will also want a detailed explanation of your symptoms. Your doctor may then want to perform a physical examination to help evaluate your problems.

If your problems have been going on for a long time, and especially if you have been having treatments and investigations for various other medical problems over a period of time, then it is certainly worth making a list of the main events in your entire medical history.

Write down:

- When and how you first suffered each symptom
- What was diagnosed (if you know) and what was done; investigations, medication etc each time.

Keep each entry short and concise, and consider handing over a copy to the doctor at the start of the consultation. This will save you both a lot of time and will help to ensure that nothing significant is forgotten.



Provider of the Original Just Can't Wait Card

Website: www.bladderandbowel.org | Email: help@bladderandbowel.org

Tests that your doctor/nurse may recommend

Remember to ask your GP or nurse what any test involves and how it can help.

1. **Colonoscopy** - a flexible fibre optic tube is passed through the back passage into the colon and the health professional performing the test can then look at the lining of the bowel and check if it is healthy.
2. **Barium Enema** - a paste is inserted into the back passage and an x-ray is taken. The barium helps to show up any problems.
3. **Internal examination** - the doctor / continence advisor puts a gloved finger into the back passage to check for any abnormalities. For men, this can also detect if the prostate gland is enlarged.
4. **Anorectal Physiology Tests** (for faecal incontinence) - these are a combination of tests which measure how the anal sphincter muscles work by assessing the muscles and nerves. The pressure inside the back passage will also be measured using a narrow catheter or tube.
5. **Anal Ultrasound** (for faecal incontinence) - a probe is inserted into the anus which provides ultrasound pictures to check if there is any damage to the muscles.
6. **Proctoscopy** (for haemorrhoids) - this is a visual inspection of the anal canal using a proctoscope. A proctoscope is a short, straight, rigid, hollow metal tube, and usually has a small light bulb mounted at the end. It is approximately 5 inches or 15 cm long.

During proctoscopy, the proctoscope is lubricated and inserted into the rectum. When the plug at the end of the tube is removed, an unobstructed view of the interior of the rectal cavity can be seen allowing the doctor to check if there are any problems causing the bleeding.

7. **Sigmoidoscopy** (for haemorrhoids) - this procedure will probably be carried out by a specialist that your GP has sent you to see. This procedure uses the same principle as the Proctoscopy but the tube that is used is longer and more flexible. This helps the doctor to see the whole of the rectum and round the bends in the colon.

The doctor will pump air into the bowel and may also take a small sample of tissue from the bowel for examination (biopsy). This is done with forceps and is not painful. You will be prepared by your doctor before this procedure takes place and will likely be asked to take a laxative or an enema before the procedure to clean out the colon.

We have an Advice Sheet for bladder health which you can download from our website at <https://www.bladderandbowel.org/downloads/>, as well as many other topics.



Provider of the Original Just Can't Wait Card

Website: www.bladderandbowel.org | Email: help@bladderandbowel.org

BLADDER & BOWEL COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Online Information Services

Online Bladder & Bowel Community offer a wide range of information, available for anyone wishing to understand their health condition better. The healthcare information is broken down into conditions, symptoms, treatments and associated conditions.

This can help patients, friends and carers and healthcare professionals to find the most appropriate information for the many different bladder and/or bowel conditions people may face.

Just Can't Wait Toilet Card

The Bladder and Bowel Community offers the original Just Can't Wait toilet card for free from our website. The card is designed to clearly communicate that the holder has a medical condition and needs to use a toilet quickly.

The card is now available as a FREE digital card for your Smartphone or for a small charge as a credit card sized plastic card, designed to fit easily into your purse, wallet or pocket. Both will help you gain access to a toilet when you're out and about, using universally recognised toilet signage to reduce embarrassment and aid swift communication.

Visit our website to:

- Apply for your FREE digital Just Can't Wait Card
- Purchase a plastic Just Can't Wait Card

www.bladderandbowel.org



Bladder & Bowel Home Delivery

Bladder & Bowel Community also offers a unique Home Delivery Service, for anyone who requires prescription urology, ostomy or regular medication delivered discreetly to their door.

Find out more about our personalised, and reliable service at:

<https://www.bladderandbowel.org/homedelivery>

Last Updated January 2023



Provider of the Original Just Can't Wait Card

Website: www.bladderandbowel.org | Email: help@bladderandbowel.org