

Retraining you bowels when you are having to rush (“holding on” programme)

Colorectal Pelvic Floor Service

Information for Patients

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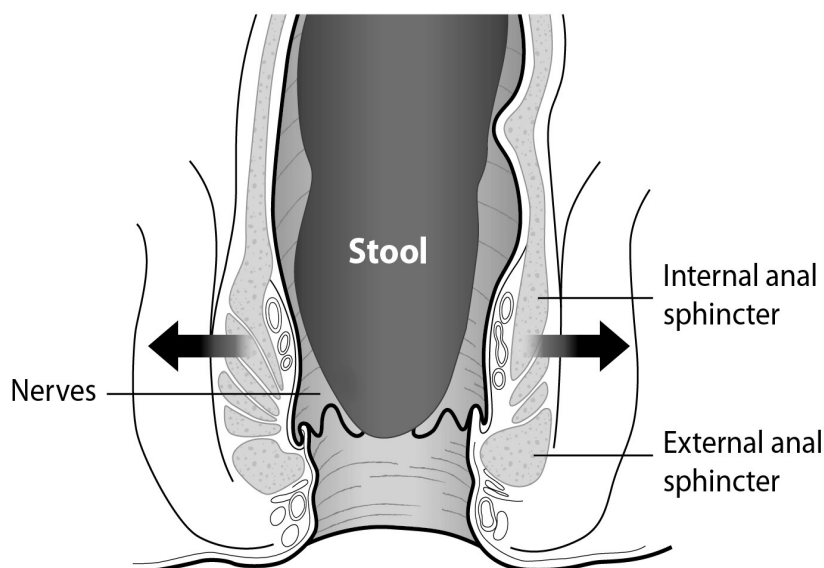
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Introduction

Bowel control does not normally take much thought but is actually a very complex and co-ordinated process. There are 2 ring muscles in the back passage: an internal and external ring or sphincter.

- The internal ring provides most of the tone to the back passage but you cannot voluntarily squeeze it.
- The external ring provides a little tone but you can voluntarily squeeze this muscle to help “hold on” to a poo.

When poo enters the lowest part of the bowel, called the rectum, the internal anal sphincter muscle relaxes to allow the poo to move down slightly to be “sampled”. This helps to tell us whether we are to expect loose or formed poo, or whether it is perhaps just wind in the rectum.

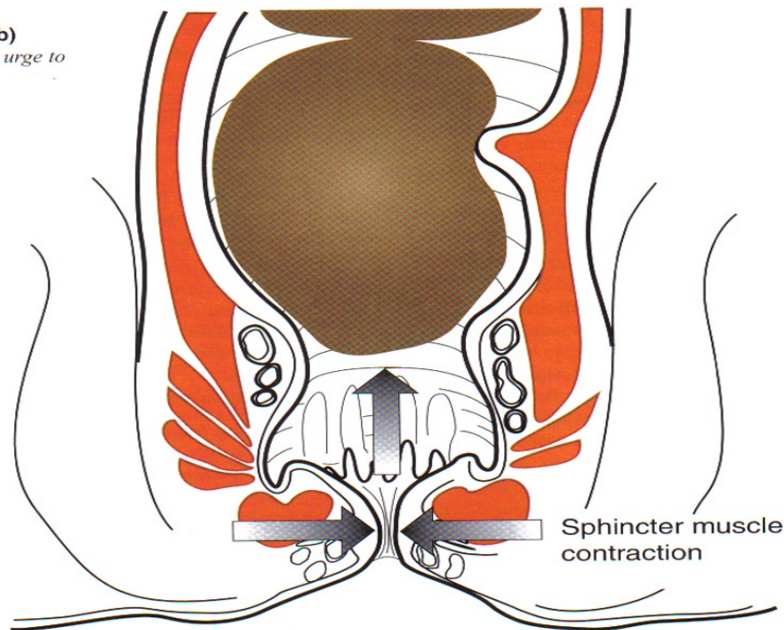


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If poo is felt but you are not able to go straight away then we squeeze the external anal sphincter muscle to push the poo back up the rectum and delay going to the toilet. This will take off the “urge” to go.

Figure 6.3(b)
Resisting the urge to defaecate.



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There are various reasons why we can have problems delaying the “call to poo”.

- Weakness in the external anal sphincter (particularly difficulties holding this muscle on) will reduce the ability to delay. See patient information leaflet “Exercising your sphincter muscles to help improve bowel control”
- The rectum may be too sensitive to the stretch from the poo (so you feel like there is more poo than there actually is)
- Loose poo is much harder to hold onto. Improving poo consistency so it looks like a formed but soft sausage can help to reduce the feeling of urgency.

Bowel retraining: The “holding on” programme

Next time you need to go to the toilet:

1. Sit on the toilet and hold on for 1 minute before trying to poo. Do not forget to take a watch/clock in with you! With time, increase this to 5 minutes. Do not worry if you cannot do this for the first few times but keep practicing.
2. When you have mastered this, repeat the above but hold on for 10 minutes before trying to

poo. It may be helpful to take something to read with you. This stage is harder but remember you are on the toilet and, so, "safe".

3. Once you are able to delay trying to poo for 10 minutes whilst on the toilet, you should now slowly move further away from the toilet. The next stage is when you want to try to poo to 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 5 minutes. Once you are able to do this, repeat the exercise increasing to 10 minutes.
4. When you are able to delay trying to poo for 10 minutes whilst off the toilet you should now gradually move further away. 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 and as you feel more confident, increase the distance between you and the toilet.

With time, you will find that you can increase the distance and the time away from the toilet. This may take some time to get used to but obviously the more practice you have at both your sphincter muscle exercises and this programme it will happen sooner rather than later.

Contact details

Contact details Leicester Pelvic Floor Service: Conservative Management Team 0116 258 3775

Please leave a message and we will respond in between clinics if possible. If you need advice about your treatment or side effects outside normal working hours, please contact your GP or NHS 111 or in life-threatening circumstances call the emergency services on 999. This will depend on the nature and urgency of your concern.

Images courtesy of St Mark's Hospital

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Previous reference:

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