

FACT SHEET

Bowel Programs for People with Neurological Conditions

By Kylie Wicks
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A neurological disorder is any disorder of the body's nervous system where the brain, spinal cord or nerves, which control how the body works, have been affected. Examples of neurological conditions may include but are not limited to:

- Spinal Cord Injuries
- Acquired Brain Injuries Multiple Sclerosis
- Spina Bifida
- Parkinson's Disease
- Cerebral Palsy
- Stroke

Neurogenic bowel dysfunction as a result of disruption to the autonomic nervous system may affect rectal sensation, sphincter function and colonic motility. Neurogenic bowel dysfunction encompasses both medical and quality of life issues. People with neurological conditions will often require the assistance of a bowel program to effectively manage stool evacuation.

The essential requirements of an effective bowel program include:

- Right consistency
- Right amount
- Right place
- Right time
- Initiated by a reliable trigger

A bowel program needs to be tailored to the individual, it must be effective, practical, reliable and socially acceptable whilst preserving digestive function and minimising complications. If you need to change your bowel program, remember that it takes time. Only change one component at a time to ensure you know what is working for you.

If you are experiencing problems with your bowel program or initiating a change, it is important to record your results. The record needs to contain information about stool consistency. A good measure of stool consistency is the Bristol Stool Chart.

Bowel preparations work in different ways and have different effects. The type of preparation an individual requires is linked to, but not limited to, the stool consistency and the type of disability. PBS bowel preparations to assist with the management of a bowel program are available under the Paraplegic and Quadriplegic Program, provided the individual is a member of an authorised association and has neurological loss resulting in paraplegia or quadriplegia. The individual must also be eligible for Medicare.

For further information about the scheme or assistance with bowel programs please contact BrightSky on 1300 88 66 01.

Bristol stool chart

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

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The Bristol Stool Chart by K.W. Heaton and S. J. Lewis, University of Bristol. Published by Heaton, K W & Lewis, S J 1997, 'Stool form scale as a useful guide to intestinal transit time'. Scandinavian Journal of Gastroenterology, vol.32, no.9, pp.920-924.

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