

# Constipation care pathway

## Information for patients

This leaflet gives you some information about the constipation care pathway at King's College Hospital and how we may be able to help you. If you have any questions, please speak to your gastroenterology clinical nurse specialist or gastroenterologist or referring clinician.

You will find out more about:

- the constipation care pathway at King's College Hospital
- how we can help you prevent, manage or recover from constipation

### **Confirming your identity**

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your name and date of birth and check your ID band. If you do not have an ID band we will also ask you to confirm your address. If we do not ask these questions, then please ask us to check. Ensuring your safety is our primary concern.

## **Introduction**

It can be difficult for patients to talk about their bowel problems, as they may find it embarrassing. The gastroenterology clinical nurse specialists specialise in bottom and bowel problems and talk about these things every day, so please feel at ease.

## **What is the constipation care pathway at King's?**

This is a nurse-led service within the multi-disciplinary gastroenterology team. We will assess your bowel symptoms and how your symptoms may be impacting on your quality of life. We may ask you to complete questionnaires at your first and final appointment to help us to assess this. An individual programme will be created for you to follow at home.

## **Who can we help?**

We can help patients who have problems with:

- slow transit constipation (sluggish bowel)
- evacuatory problems (getting the urge to go, but struggling to start or complete emptying)
- irritable bowel syndrome, where constipation is a main symptom
- neurogenic bowel (constipation related to spinal injury or neurological disease)

## **What we can do to help you to help yourself**

When you attend the Bowel Function Clinic, we will start by giving you a full explanation of your digestive system and any investigations that you may have had. You will have the opportunity to ask questions and seek re-assurance about your symptoms. We also:

- take a detailed bowel assessment
- give health education including advice on diet and fluid intake, exercise and stress management
- provide advice on toilet positioning and straining
- teach you how to do anal strengthening exercises
- challenge behaviour around your current bowel routine/habit therapy
- teach you how to relax the muscles of your pelvic floor and back passage
- teach you how to perform self-administered abdominal massage
- signpost you to self-referral for support with mental health problems (IAPT – Improving Access to Psychological Therapy)
- teach you how to self-administer suppositories
- introduce you to using self-administered rectal irrigation if appropriate and safe for you

## **How to access the pathway**

Your clinician at King's can refer you onto the constipation care pathway.

## **What will happen on the pathway?**

Most patients have appointments at regular intervals. It usually takes several months for improvement to occur and this improvement often continues following completion of therapy. You will have to work hard to make this therapy effective. However, most people find this therapy improves their bowel function. Patients will be offered appointments either face to face, on the

telephone or in a group setting. You will be seen by the same nurse specialist throughout your time on the pathway. There will be the opportunity to talk about your symptoms and get advice and support from your nurse. They may wish to examine you at some point during the pathway, but will let you know if this is necessary and will discuss what this involves.

There will be a written programme of advice which we will agree with you is “doable” for you at your appointments. This is what we will ask you to practice every day. It is important to be honest about what you feel you have the time and motivation to commit to.

If you do not follow the advice that has been given and agreed, the constipation is unlikely to improve and we may be unable to move you onto the next stage until this is completed. We do ask that you try to commit to all the advice given to you. This is important as once you have completed the pathway you will have learnt strategies to self-manage.

### **What happens after you have completed your sessions on the care pathway?**

The nurse specialist will discharge you from the pathway and write to your referring doctor and GP with a detailed report of your progress.

### **What if my problems return after I have been discharged from the clinic?**

Please see your GP in the first instance. If necessary, you can then be re-referred to us.

### **Other organisations where you can access advice:**

#### **Bladder & Bowel Community**

The Bladder & Bowel Community is a UK organisation that provides information and support services for people with bladder and bowel control problems.

[www.bladderandbowel.org](http://www.bladderandbowel.org)

Email: [help@bladderandbowel.org](mailto:help@bladderandbowel.org)

#### **Guts UK**

Guts is the UK charity for the digestive system.

[www.gutscharity.org.uk](http://www.gutscharity.org.uk)

Email: [info@gutscharity.org.uk](mailto:info@gutscharity.org.uk)

Tel: 020 7486 0341

#### **The IBS Network**

[www.theibsnetwork.org](http://www.theibsnetwork.org)

National charity supporting people with irritable bowel syndrome.

Email: [info@theibsnetwork.org](mailto:info@theibsnetwork.org)

Tel: 0114 272 3253

## **Sharing your information**

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

## **Care provided by students**

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by imaging patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your imaging will not be affected by your decision.

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Email: [kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net)

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND

Tel: 01689 863252

Email: [kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net)

**If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Communications and Interpreting telephone line on 020 3299 4826 or email [kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net)**