

# Abdominal massage for constipation

Advice from the Pelvic Floor Unit

## What is abdominal massage?

It is a clockwise massage over your abdomen (tummy) that takes 10 to 20 minutes. It aims to relieve constipation and can be done in most positions – lying, sitting or standing.

## How can abdominal massage help me?

**Abdominal massage can:**

- reduce the need for long-term laxative medication
- help to relieve flatulence (wind) and/or constipation
- make it less likely that you will need to come into hospital due to bowel overloading and associated health problems.

## Who can give it?

Anyone who undertakes the appropriate training can give abdominal massage. This could be your partner/carer or yourself.

## Who can benefit from abdominal massage?

- Most people suffering from chronic constipation.
- People with tummy cramps due to wind.
- People who continue to have some problems with emptying their bowels in spite of having regular enemas.
- People who regularly take laxatives to have their bowels open.

## Abdominal massage is not for people who have:

- a history of malignant bowel obstruction or an abdominal growth
- a history of inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis
- spastic colon (not to be confused with spasticity of the abdominal wall) experienced in patients with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- an unstable spinal injury
- recent scarring or abdominal surgery.

You should not use abdominal massage if you are pregnant. If you have an abdominal hernia-hiatus, umbilical or inguinal, massage can be used but with care. Ask a doctor or nurse if you are unsure about any of the above.

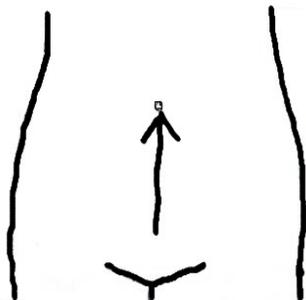
## How do we know it works?

Research has shown that the use of massage techniques as part of a wider bowel management programme can improve bowel function.

Statistical analysis show that there is no difference between laxative therapy and abdominal massage therapy when assessing how much time it takes for food to move through the digestive system.

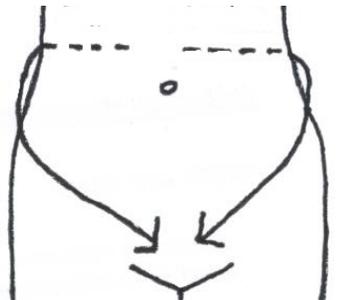
We also know that laxatives can become less effective over time, so abdominal massage can offer a better and safer alternative.

### Step 1



Stroke upwards 3 times

### Step 2



Stroke towards the bottom of your tummy 3 times

### Step 3

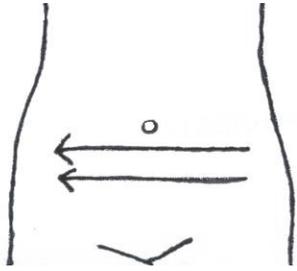
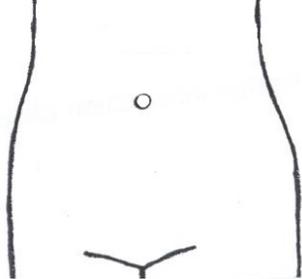


Effleurage or circular stroking

### Step 4



Palmer kneading (one hand performs a circular movement, quickly followed by the other, moving down the stomach)

<p><b>Step 5</b></p> <p>As Step 4, but moving up the stomach</p>	<p><b>Step 6</b></p> <p>Repeat steps 4 and 5</p>
<p><b>Step 7</b></p>  <p><b>Stroking</b></p>	<p><b>Step 8</b></p>  <p><b>Hand vibrations over the belly button area</b></p>

**Repeat each of the above movements several times. Abdominal massage should be done once a day for around 10 to 20 minutes.**

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about abdominal massage, please contact the Pelvic Floor Unit on **020 7188 4191**.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)





## Contact us

### **Pharmacy Medicines Helpline**

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

**t:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's

**e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

### **Language Support Services**

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

**t:** 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

### **NHS Choices**

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

**Leaflet number: 3008/VER2**

Date published: June 2014

Review date: June 2017

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