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Bowel Retraining

Bowel Movement Control Techniques

Unless you are experiencing incontinence, you should always listen to your body if you feel the need for a bowel movement. If you are experiencing incontinence (you can't hold the feces in before you get to the toilet and/or need to rush to the toilet to make it on time) there are retraining techniques for resisting the urge and helping you gain control. The retraining techniques work best when you are also doing regular exercises to strengthen the muscles of the sphincter and pelvic floor muscles.

Retraining techniques help your rectal and anal canal (where you store the stool), your pelvic floor muscles and your sphincter muscles learn to overcome the problem. When you have some success holding on, you become more confident, experience less panic and therefore feel less urgency. The less you panic, the easier it is to make the urge go away.

Resisting the Urge in Order to Gain Control

With following steps you will become aware of your current ability to control your urge to have a bowel movement and to start practicing urge delay while on the toilet.

- First, time your current ability to hold on to a bowel movement. Take a watch to the bathroom and time your delay time.
- Next time you feel the urge to have a bowel movement, sit on the toilet and try to hold on for seconds longer or up to one minute before having a bowel movement. Remember that you are sitting on the toilet and are therefore "safe" if you are not able to do this for the first few times.
- Once successful with your first hold-on time, increase the delay time up to 5 minutes.

Progression Techniques

These steps are more challenging, but remember that you are sitting on the toilet and are therefore "safe." Gradually, you will find that you can increase the distance and time away from the toilet and the bathroom. It will take time to master, but the more you practice this program, along with pelvic floor and sphincter exercises, the sooner you are likely to succeed.

- Progress from 5 minutes to holding on for 10 minutes before allowing yourself to have a bowel movement.
- Next, begin moving away from the toilet. Sit near the toilet when you feel the need to have a bowel movement. Choose either the edge of the bathtub or a chair near the toilet. Hold on for 5 minutes. Once you are able to do this, repeat the exercise, increasing to 10 minutes.
- Finally, move outside the bathroom. Your muscles are becoming stronger and your awareness of the sensation changes is increasing. Your goal should be able to hold on for 10 minutes any distance away from the toilet.