We need to talk about Poo!

The Problem
People with learning disabilities are more likely to have constipation than other people.

- 14% of people in the general population suffer from Constipation
- 20-50% people with a learning disability suffer from Constipation
- 70% of people with a learning disability living in institutions suffer from constipation

Constipation means having difficulty in have a bowel movement (having a poo). Constipation can last a long time – it can lead to serious health issues and in some cases it can lead to death.

What can cause Constipation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor diet – limited fibre</th>
<th>Lack of exercise</th>
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<tr>
<td>Not drinking enough fluids – the amount of fluid people need will vary</td>
<td>Medication – as a direct side effect or as a result of a number of medications</td>
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<td>Environment for using the toilet – time to have a poo, a relaxing atmosphere and the correct position</td>
<td>Lack of routine – when are people able to go – does it fit with their own body “rhythms”</td>
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Effects of Constipation
Some people with learning disabilities find it difficult to tell people about their symptoms and pain. This can result in delays in diagnosing and treating constipation. Symptoms can be overlooked – “diagnostic overshadowing” with symptoms attributed to something else – for example, deteriorating mental health.

Effects of Constipation can include:
- Increase in epileptic seizures
- Behaviour that challenges
- Tiredness
- Lack of Appetite
- Bloating
- Damaged Bowel
- Pain
- Being sick
- Wind
- Bad Breath
What can we do about constipation?
There are lots of different things that can be done:

- Healthy diet
- Exercise
- Have a medication review
- Talk about constipation and bowel movements – we need to talk about poo!
- Create a comfortable environment
- Support people to have time to poo
- Consider different treatments; laxatives treat the symptoms not underlying causes
- Monitor bowel movements – the Bristol Stool Chart can be very helpful