



York and Scarborough  
Teaching Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Collecting a Stool (faeces) Sample

Information for patients, relatives and carers

**Department of Clinical Biochemistry**

① For more information, please contact:

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## **Why is a Stool Sample Needed?**

Although many laboratory tests can be carried out on blood and urine samples, some conditions are best diagnosed by analysing a small amount of faeces. These tend to be conditions associated with the digestive tract, e.g. if your doctor suspects inflammation, bleeding, cancer or an infection.

## **Collection Containers**

Your GP or another healthcare professional, such as a nurse, should explain why they require a stool sample from you and how to collect it. They will provide you with a clean, dry, screw-top plastic container. If you lose the collection container, contact your local GP surgery to ask for a replacement.

# How to Collect a Stool Sample

Read carefully through the following instructions **before** attempting to collect a sample:

1. Label your container with your full name, date of birth and the date.
2. Unscrew the top of the tube. You should find a spatula attached to the lid, which can be used to scoop out a small portion of your sample. When you are ready to produce a stool sample, keep the tube to hand and find a plastic bag that can be used to dispose of any waste.
3. If you need to urinate, please do so before attempting to produce a stool sample to avoid contamination.
4. The aim of sampling is to produce and capture a stool without it touching the inside of the toilet, and becoming contaminated with water. To do this, try one of the following:
  - Place something in the toilet to catch the stool, such as a potty or a clean, empty plastic food container.
  - Spread clean newspaper or plastic wrap over the toilet rim to catch the stool.
  - Use several layers of toilet roll to support and remove the stool.

5. Once the stool has been caught, use the spatula that comes with the container to scoop out a small portion (one 'spoonful' is plenty. This should be about the size of a grape for a formed stool sample). Do not attempt to fit the whole stool into the container, as this can cause it to leak.
6. Carefully place the spatula containing the stool sample back into the bottom half of the plastic container and screw the lid shut, ensuring that it is tightly sealed.
7. Put anything you used to collect the sample (e.g. newspaper, plastic wrap) in the plastic waste bag, tie it up and put it the bin.
8. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water.
9. Follow any other instructions your doctor gives you, for example, some stool samples must be protected from light. If this is the case, samples should be sealed within a brown paper envelope or black bin bag, or wrapped entirely in foil. If you did not receive any further instructions, simply place the plastic sample container into a plastic bag.

## **Storing a Stool Sample**

Stool samples should be handed in to your GP as soon as possible. If you can't hand the stool sample in immediately, you should store it in a fridge, but for no longer than 24 hours.

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Maria de Ferrars, Principal Clinical Scientist, Laboratory Medicine, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 725599.

## **Teaching, training and research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

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

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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