

Pan-pathology

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Author: Dr Paul Godwin  
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## How should I collect and store a stool (faeces) sample?

You should:

- collect your stool (faeces) sample in a clean container
- store the container in a fridge in a sealed plastic bag if you can't hand it in straight away

### Collecting a stool sample

Your GP or another healthcare professional such as a nurse should explain to you how to collect the stool sample. The stool sample should be collected in a clean, dry screw-top container. Your doctor or Airedale hospital will provide you with a plastic (specimen) container.

Try not to collect urine or water (from the toilet) with the stool sample but don't worry if you do. If you need to urinate, do this first, and then collect the stool sample.

To collect a stool sample:

- label the container with your name, date of birth and the date
- place something in the toilet to catch the stool, such as a potty or an empty plastic food container, or spread clean newspaper or plastic wrap over the rim of the toilet
- make sure the sample doesn't touch the inside of the toilet
- use the spoon or spatula that comes with the container to place the sample in a clean screw-top container and screw the lid shut
- if you've been given a container, aim to fill around a third of it (that's about the size of a walnut if you're using your own container)
- put anything you used to collect the sample in a plastic bag, tie it up and put it the bin
- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water

If your doctor gives you any other instructions, follow these also.

### Storing a stool sample

Stool samples should be delivered to the laboratory 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). Place the container in a sealed plastic bag first. In certain instances stool samples cannot be analysed if they have been refrigerated (your doctor will tell you if this is the case).

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Stool samples must be fresh. If they aren't, the bacteria in them can multiply. This means that the levels of bacteria in the stool sample won't be the same as the levels of bacteria in your digestive system. If the levels of bacteria don't match, the test results may not be accurate.

If you can't hand your stool sample in immediately, find out how long it can be kept in the fridge. Your GP or the healthcare professional who requested the test will be able to tell you.

### **What are stool samples used for?**

Your GP or another healthcare professional may ask you for a stool sample to help them diagnose a health condition or rule it out. Stools contain bacteria and other substances that are present in the digestive system. By testing the levels of these substances and bacteria in your stools, healthcare professionals can work out what's happening in your digestive system.

Adapted from the [NHS Choices Website](#)