



**SPHERE Bladder and Bowel Service**

## **Gastro-Colic Reflex**

The gastro-colic reflex is a physiological reflex that occurs in response to stretching of the stomach after eating a meal and the arrival of by-products of digestion in the small intestine. This reflex is responsible for the urge to have bowels open following a meal, thus helping to make room for more food.

The process normally takes approximately 20 – 30 minutes, so you can expect the urge to have bowels open to occur within 20 – 30 minutes of eating a meal, particularly after breakfast.

Using this knowledge to assist a patient/client to sit on the toilet soon after meals can greatly reduce the risk of constipation, faecal incontinence and faecal smearing.