



Regularising Bowel Movement Part 2

Appearance and Colour of Stool

The Bristol Stool Chart shows seven categories of stool. Every person will have different bowel habits, but the important thing is that your stools are soft and easy to pass – like types 3 and 4 below.

Bristol Stool Chart

Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
Type 2		Sausage-shaped but lumpy
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on its surface
Type 4		Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
Type 5		Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (passed easily)
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces. Entirely Liquid

(Source: Wikipedia; licensed under Creative Commons License)

- Types 1 – 2: Indicate constipation
- Types 3 – 4: Ideal stools as they are easy to pass
- Types 5 – 7: May indicate diarrhoea and urgency

The color of the stool helps to identify the underlying cause. Red colored stool is seen in haemorrhoids, diverticulosis, pale colored stool is due to the blockage of bile, black color in upper gastrointestinal bleeding and green color in delayed transit of stool. Once the cause is treated, the stool will regain its normal colour.

Causes of Constipation

Identifying the cause of constipation helps to make the necessary changes. It is triggered in some who suppress the urge or who do not try sufficient times for a better bowel movement.

The most common causes seen are due to

- Sedentary lifestyle
- Suppressing the urge to defecate
- Changes in routine
- Lack of fibre in food
- Stress
- Pregnancy
- Dehydration
- Sluggish metabolism
- Pelvic floor dysfunction
- Impaired rectal contractions
- Reduced motility of colon

Systemic conditions that slows the bowel movements

There could be other reasons that could slow bowel movements and cause constipation. As there could be underlying medical conditions, it is best to consult a doctor in these cases.

Gastrointestinal reasons

- Anal fissure
- Haemorrhoids or piles
- Anorectal malformations
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Colon cancer

Endocrine reasons

- Cystic fibrosis
- Hypercalcaemia
- Hypothyroidism

Neurological reasons

- Diabetes mellitus
- Stroke
- Muscular dystrophy
- Parkinson's disease
- Multiple sclerosis
- Spinal cord anomalies

There are certain medicines that cause constipation like the iron or calcium supplements, antidepressants, epilepsy medicines, opiate pain killers and treatments like Chemotherapy and Radiation therapy. In that case, it must be discussed with the treating physician for an alternate medicine or supportive medicines that can be taken to regulate bowel movements.



Irregular Bowel Movements in Women

Irregular bowel movement is common in women due to the hormonal fluctuations with menstruation. Constipation before periods is seen due to the progesterone surge and loose stools during periods due to the fall of progesterone. There will be bloating due to the hormonal variations irrespective of what you eat during the premenstrual period.

How to Overcome Symptoms?

- ✓ Include nuts, greens, bananas, figs, prunes and kiwi fruit
- ✓ Warm spice tea with coriander, dried ginger, aniseeds and fennels seeds will help to relieve bloating and improve the bowel movements
- ✓ Daily exercise, except menstruating days
- ✓ Reduce stress levels
- ✓ Try to have good sleep

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