

Bowel Function

Optimal bowel function can be seen in those who have one to three bowel movements per day that are soft, formed and easy to pass.

Infrequent and difficult to pass bowel movements (constipation) are not only an annoyance but can cause multiple health problems. Stagnant, old stool can cling to the sides of the intestines impairing absorption of nutrients. This can lead the body to have difficulty in manufacturing and utilizing enzymes and neurotransmitters that are critical to optimal functioning of the body and brain. Those with chronic constipation often have problems with fatigue and depression as a result.

For optimal bowel function **avoid** these foods:

Dairy- including milk and cheese made from cow's milk slow digestion causing constipation. Dairy is a major culprit of constipation, particularly in children.

Gluten- As many as 50% of the population in the U.S. have sensitivity to gluten which can cause multiple forms of digestive upset including constipation.

Low fiber starches- avoid white rice, white bread, white potatoes.

Caffeine and tannins- Tea and chocolate have both which can slow digestion and pull fluid from the stool. Avoid colas as well.

Red meat- Is difficult for the body to digest and is high in iron which slows digestion.

Alcohol- is dehydrating and can pull fluid from the stool causing to be hard and difficult to pass.

Sugar and artificial sweeteners- these cause the death of beneficial gut bacteria leading to constipation.

To improve and maintain healthy bowel function **do the following:**

Stay hydrated- drink a minimum of 8-10 glasses of water per day.

Eat fiber- at least 30 grams of fiber per day is optimal and can come from a variety of nuts, seeds and vegetables. Chia seeds are a good supplement if you are having difficulty getting this much fiber.

Exercise- 20 to 30 minutes of exercise per day encourages the movement of the intestines and regular bowel movements.

Use a squatting position- this can be achieved by using a foot stool or a squatty potty when having a bowel movement. This position strengthens rectal muscles and encourages full emptying of the bowel.

Keep a regular schedule- In addition to having a positive impact on mental and physical health, having a regular sleeping and eating schedule “train” your bowels to move at certain times of the day.

Go when you have the urge- the longer stool sits in the colon; the more water is absorbed and the harder the stool will become.

Magnesium- Magnesium is important for cell functioning and most people are deficient. Some forms of magnesium can aide in regular bowel function. One can supplement with 200mg per day with magnesium citrate and gradually increase the dose until stools are soft.