



THE ROAD TO HEALTH & WELLNESS

HEALTH TOPIC OF THE WEEK

2/12 - The Scoop on Poop



Introduction

If you are an EPT client, then you have experienced a comprehensive evaluation. Part of the process that may have surprised you – and even made you feel uncomfortable – was questions about bowel habits. While talking about poop doesn't make for a good dinner conversation, it does provide invaluable insight into our gut health and often our overall health.

In a world of expensive medical diagnostic tests, there's a free and convenient way to gain insight into your digestive system – paying attention to the frequency, size, consistency, and color of your poop. If your poop wouldn't currently win any "best in show" awards, certain diet and lifestyle changes could make a world of difference – and give you healthier and more pleasurable bowel movements. More importantly, proper bowel movement frequency and consistency mean better health.

Everybody Poops

Young kids seem to delight in talking about poop - everyone else not so much. However, people certainly have lots of questions about it.

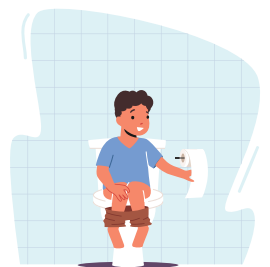


Google reports that the search term "poop" is one of their most frequently searched topics and has remained that way for the last five years. Ironically, there are more Google searches for poop than exercise.



What Is Poop?

Poop, also known as feces or fecal matter, is your body's way of getting rid of solid waste. It is the final stop before it exits your digestive system. Typically, poop is about 75% water and 25% solid material. It consists of undigested proteins, fats, carbohydrates, bacterial mass and fiber. Unfortunately, it may also contain microplastics lurking in our food.



Elite Personal Training and Fitness Solutions does not provide medical treatment or intervention. We acknowledge scientific evidence that appropriately intensive exercise and sustainable nutritional intervention can have significant impact on chronic health disorders and obesity, dramatically improving symptoms when recommendations are followed. Please visit us at Eliteptf.com for more information and to schedule your evaluation.

Why is Pooping So Important?

Well, if you didn't defecate, I suppose you would eventually explode – LOL. But here's a better scientific answer:

Research shows a strong association between constipation and oxidative stress. When we eliminate waste on a regular basis, we lower oxidative stress in our bodies. Not pooping frequently enough increases the risk of chronic disease, cardiovascular disease and some cancers.



Transit Time

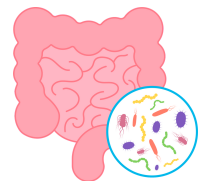
Peristalsis is the term used to describe the motility or speed of movement through our digestive tract. Transit time is a key factor in digestive health. There are healthy ranges of transit times and then there is too fast or too slow.



Our bodies need a certain amount of time to absorb water and critical nutrients. That's why when stool moves through too quickly [diarrhea] it cause dehydration and leave us undernourished.



Poop with less water content has moved through the digestive system too slowly. Excessive water absorption from waste results in hard stools. This condition is called constipation. While many people joke about it, constipation is far more problematic than just pain from passing hard stools. Since the waste material is moving too slowly, there is greater contact time between waste and the intestinal wall. This increases the formation and absorption of fecal mutagens – substances that cause DNA mutations in cancer – into the circulation. Increased contact time also destroys the spacing in the gut lining. Now microscopic waste particles can leak into your blood system, which wreaks incredible havoc with your health.



Female Poop Concerns

Pooping is important for everyone, but male and female bodies handle poop a bit differently. Because female reproductive organs take up more space than the male equivalent, female colons must be longer to navigate around all that non-digestive real estate. Food, therefore, takes longer to go from mouth to anus in females, which may be a central reason why women suffer from G.I. discomfort more so than men.



As poop moves through the colon, water and other components are reabsorbed by the body. If the process takes too long, it can cause a problem because estrogen and other hormones that are supposed to be “on the way out” get reabsorbed. Lots of fiber in the colon reduces circulating estrogen levels and decreases reabsorption.



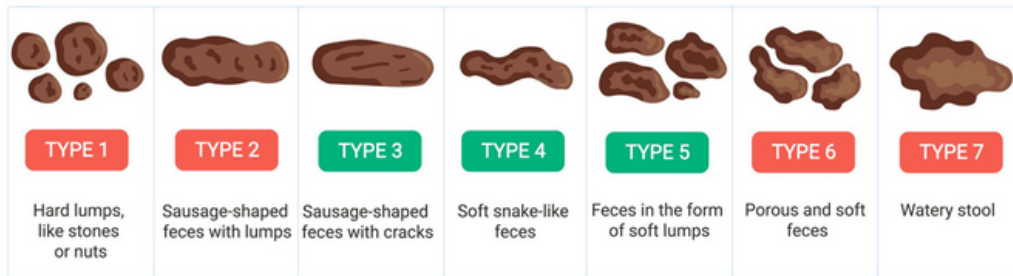
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What Does Healthy Poop Look Like?

Have you ever looked at your poop? I mean, really looked at it. If not, well, there's no time like the present! (Or the near future, unless you're actually reading this on the can).



Aside from simple curiosity, your poop can tell you a lot about your health. In fact, there's a widely used diagnostic called the Bristol Stool Scale that's been around for a few decades. It shows images of seven different types of poops and explains what each form signifies.



Types one and two show signs of constipation, which may have many possible causes, including some medical conditions and medications.

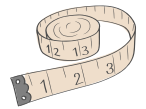
Types five, six, and seven show signs of diarrhea, which is often caused by imbalanced bacteria/poor gut health. It can also be caused by infections, viruses, food allergies and intolerances, antibiotics and certain medical conditions.

Your poop will differ in shape, size, color, and odor, even from day to day, based on what you eat or drink, whether you're sick, or if you're menstruating.

A not-quite-normal poop isn't always a sign of something serious. But if abnormal bowel movements last for longer than two weeks or are accompanied by other serious symptoms, you may want to consult with a health care professional.

What is a Normal Poop Size?

In general, large poops indicate better health than small ones. Smaller and more compact stools may indicate low fiber intake, whereas larger and moister stools may indicate high fiber intake.



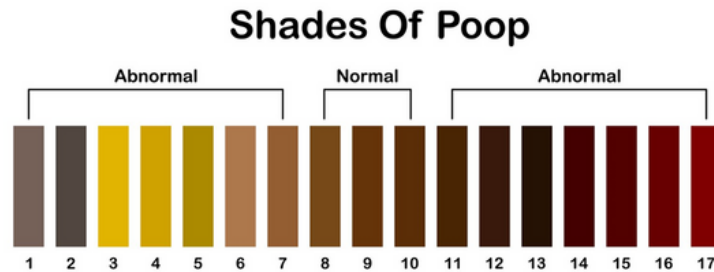
The target poop size is typically 4–8 inches long. How much should you poop? Back in 1992, a study of 20 populations across a dozen countries found that among people whose total daily poop weighed half a pound or less, colon cancer rates increased dramatically. And in those people whose daily poop total was around four ounces, colon cancer rates quadrupled. (Don't worry, I'm not asking you to save and weigh all your deposits! I think you get the point.)



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What Color Is Healthy Poop?

Besides shape and size, you can learn much about your health from the color of your poop. While none of these hues are likely to win the color of the year, you can use this guide to understand healthy stool colors and whether your poop falls into the normal range.



Brown poop

Brown is the normal color of poop. It is the product of three different colored substances that combine when hemoglobin is broken down.



Yellow poop

Yellow poop might be a clue to the presence of undigested fat in the stool. Likely causes include pancreatic disorders, bacterial or viral illness of the digestive system, cystic fibrosis, or celiac disease. If this happens occasionally, it's probably not a worry. But if your poop is consistently yellow, that's a different story.

Black poop

When your poop comes out black, it may be caused by some supplements or medications typically prescribed for GI symptoms, such as iron pills or bismuth-containing medications [think Pepto-Bismol].

Is dark poop bad? Dark brown poop or black poop may also indicate upper GI bleeding (sometimes accompanied by other symptoms such as dizziness) due to an ulcer or colon cancer. If you have black poop that is not associated with a supplement or medication change, then make an appointment with your PCP.



Maroon or red poop

When your poop starts looking like a beet, the first suspect may, in fact, be a beet. Certain red foods, including beets, cranberries, prune juice, and processed foods with added red food dyes, can stain your stool reddish and have no particular health significance whatsoever. Other reasons for red poop may not be so benign. If that red is from blood in your stool, it may indicate GI tract bleeding in the lower parts of the small intestines or the colon.



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Green poop

Green colored poops can arise from the consumption of lots of green vegetables or large amounts of powdered greens.

The most common medical condition that colors feces green is diarrhea, such as the kind caused by IBS. People who have had their gallbladders removed can also produce green poop, as can bacterial and viral infections.



Gray or clay - colored poop

Gray, clay-colored stools contain little or no bile. This may signify a condition where the flow of bile to the intestine is obstructed. Sometimes such a biliary obstruction is caused by a tumor or gallstone, either in the bile duct or nearby pancreas.



How Often Should You Poop?

Sometimes there's a big difference between normal [conforming to the norm] and healthy. Bowel movement frequency is one of these situations. "Normal" bowel movement frequency is affected by many things including in age and gender. People tend to move their bowels less as they age. Females tend to have fewer bowel movements than men and will experience harder stools. Exercise and diet also play big roles.

While there's not clear data to mandate absolute normal frequency, that doesn't mean we can't generalize. In general, we recognize that having a daily bowel movement is a good thing.



Action Steps for Good Gut Health

- **Get enough fiber**

EPT has written several newsletters on fiber and its importance. In our nutrition counseling we talk about it in detail. Fiber is one of the most important nutrients to keep you regular and reduce constipation. Very few Americans consume enough fiber. EPT recommends a minimum of 30 g per day.



- **Stay hydrated**

Fiber needs water to do its job in your digestive system. Water also helps break down food and assists your body in both absorbing nutrients and eliminating toxins.

Forget about consuming a certain number of ounces of water per day. There is no research that confirms the proper amount, and it varies significantly from person to person. Shaquille O'Neal needs a lot more water than a frail elderly woman. Your urine should be clear or pale yellow if you're adequately hydrated. If it tends to be darker yellow, you need to drink more water.



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• Exercise

Exercise stimulates your body to move food through your digestive system. Regular exercise increases blood flow to the digestive system, which makes it work more efficiently. Exercise positively affects the gut microbiota [microorganisms living in your digestive tract].



Be Good to Your Gut

Diet is key here. The standard American diet [SAD] is atrocious. It leaves most Americans with a deranged gut microbiota. The following action steps are crucial:

- Cut way back on processed food
- Include fiber in your diet
- Add whole foods
- Choose organic when possible
- Stay away from bioengineered food
- Wash all produce to reduce chemical residue
- Reduce sugar
- Limit alcohol consumption



Healthy Foods for Your Gut

- Apples
- Flaxseeds
- Bananas
- Pumpkins
- Mushrooms
- Prunes
- Oats
- Leafy greens
- Chia seeds
- Legumes
- Pears



Train your Bowels

Whenever possible, go to the bathroom as soon as you have the urge. If you don't have a bowel movement when you feel the urge, the impulse will go away only to return stronger until you eliminate what your body wants to get rid of.



Obviously, having a bowel movement every time you have the urge isn't always possible. However, a persistent delay will cause the urge for defecation to diminish over time, resulting in difficulty in having a bowel movement, especially as you get older. That's one of the reasons why you often hear older individuals talking about their bowels, using laxatives or taking enemas.



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If you are constipated, consider the natural option of magnesium over a commercial laxative. Magnesium eases constipation by drawing water into the colon. The recommended dosage is typically 500 mg.



Summary

Pooping is a natural bodily function. Although it doesn't come up in casual conversation, it's a topic that warrants careful attention. Don't be afraid to look in the toilet. The consistency, size, and color of your poop can reveal a great deal about your overall health.

Fortunately, you can improve your pooping status. However, some lifestyle changes are difficult to implement. EPT can help with that process. Here's to Healthy Bowel Movements!



This article was contributed by David Trumbore PT, DPT, CSCI, CWT, CPI, CFNP
For his bio, please see <https://www.elitepersonaltrainingandfitnessolutions.com/david-trumbore>

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