

Food as Medicine: Keep Things Moving

Pooping is SO important to our health. Skipping a day occasionally when traveling or due to stress isn't a big deal. However, chronic constipation can really exacerbate a variety of health concerns: pain, teeth clenching, skin problems (acne, eczema, and psoriasis), insomnia, headaches and eye symptoms. Whether constipation has been a life long reality or recent issue for you, consider the options below. **Try one thing at a time for a week** in the laboratory of your own body. Pay attention and keep track to see what's happening. Individual consultation is most appropriate in figuring out what combination of the suggestions below will help *keep things moving* in a good way. Please note that severely impacted bowels can be a life-threatening situation.

HYDRATION

Between 55-60% of our bodies is water. We are it and we need it. However, I'm not convinced by the modern myth that we are all bordering on continual dehydration. Our ancestors managed to sustain activity for long periods without a water bottle always at hand. It's important to remember the kidneys are a pump not a sieve. They do have to work when we introduce fluids into the body.

When your mouth feels dry or you have a sense of being parched, drink. Sip simple fluids: water (room temperature or warmer) or herbal tea. Pause to delight in a wonderful warm beverage. If you don't routinely, drink at least ½-1c of some fluid at least every 2-3 hours. Keep a glass or water bottle somewhere in view of your daily tasks at work or home. Set your computer or a phone app to periodically remind you, "Am I thirsty?" If you snack continually, you may be actually confusing hunger for thirst. When reaching for a snack, consider a sip of water first. Making sure we're properly hydrated really helps *keep things moving*.

EXERCISE -

Our bodies were designed to move. If you have a seated job, make sure you walk for 15 minutes at least several times a day. This could be walking the stairs on a break, parking farther away when doing errands, walking briskly to the bus or during lunch. Make a point to do some more vigorous movement daily or at least 4x/week. Moving the body does several things to move the bowels. It tells the body that you actually need fuel. It stimulates peristalsis in the gut as it breaks down the food you've eaten to fuel your physical activity. Finally, it physically stimulates movement of all the internal organs. It essentially massages the intestines into action. Move throughout the day.

FOOD -

Our bodies benefit from regularity. A regular schedule and regular meals help regular bowel movements. Additionally, some foods can really get or keep things moving. Vegetables, legumes and fruit introduce insoluble fiber into the digestive tract and act as locomotives to gently move things through. The oily nature of seeds and nuts lubricates the bowels to move things along. Oats are also loaded with fiber and help move things along when eaten regularly. By contract, for many people breads, simple starches and cheese act like play-dough gumming up the works.

- Vegetables. Raw will move the bowels but are harder on the gut. Light steamed or sautéed are gentle and effective
- Fruit. Particularly beneficial: apple with the skin, pears, prunes, figs cooked like apple sauce.
- Legumes: lentils, kidney beans, chickpeas etc. are high in fiber an (½ -1 cup daily).
- Ground flax seed (1tsp-2Tbls).
- Emollient nuts and seeds eaten in moderation. 8-10 nuts is a serving. It can be very easy to eat a day's calories in a few handfuls of salted cashews.
- Limit bread. Large amounts, even gluten free, of refined flour will slow the bowels.

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SUPPLEMENTS-

In addition to food, some supplements support bowel regulation without the harsh impact of stool softeners or laxatives.

- *Jarrow Sacro B* – this is a probiotic to support the colon's micro flora.
- Daily Fiber supplement. *Yerba Prima Daily Fiber* is a relatively affordable good product which is not strictly psyllium based but includes oat bran, apple pectin etc.
- Magnesium – For some people daily Magnesium is a predictable, reliable way to regulate otherwise stubborn bowels.
- Vitamin C – If constipation is severe, large doses of vitamin C effectively loosen even liquefy the stool.

ABDOMINAL MASSAGE –

This can be a simple evening ritual as you lie in bed and prepare for sleep. Bending your knees will allow your belly to relax. For general abdominal massage begin on the lower right side of your belly. Press down with your fingers on top of each other. With medium pressure draw your fingers up toward your ribs, across to the left and down toward your iliac crest, the top part of your hip and then slightly toward the center just below your navel. You are supporting the natural movement of the colon from its connection with the small intestine all the way to the rectum where it exits the body as shown in the image below. If your bowels have not moved in more than 2 days, it may be more appropriate and comfortable to 'uncork the bottle'. Here begin on the left, pressing down in short strokes backing up a few inches at a time all the way to the bottom right (as indicated in the first approach).

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