



IT'S TIME TO FEEL GOOD AGAIN

THIS WEEK'S TOPIC

Health Clues

Living Tissue Samples

"The information that you can provide your health care provider about your bowel habits and function is almost incomparable."

I remember when I entered the natural medicine field almost 30 years ago and quickly realized that the nutritionist and the true health practitioners were extremely interested in the bowel and bowel function; I thought how weird is that? Bowel habits and function are a very personal and private thing for most of us. However, the information that you can provide your health care provider about your bowel habits is almost incomparable. It provides a current living tissue sample.

If you are a regular viewer of the Wellness Minute you already know the importance of a healthy digestive system. Over 70% of the immune system has its origins in the digestive tract. The digestive tract also plays a huge role in hormone metabolism and cholesterol regulation, to name a few important roles.

Taking a close look at your stool can tell you a lot about what's going on in your intestines and with your body in general. It can lead you to

make the right changes to improve your digestive and overall health. If you know what to look for, it's like reading a map and realizing exactly where you are and how to get to your destination. I tell my patients that if they pay close attention to what's going on in the bowl, they can provide me with information and clues about their health.

Here's a guide to some of the most likely conditions that can lead to changes in the shape, size, smell and shade of your stool.



Shape
Insufficient fiber in the diet, diverticulosis, bowel spasm or excessive straining are common causes of a change in stool shape.

Size
Small, hard stools are typical in people eating a low-fiber Western diet, and not drinking enough water. Constipation is associated with small, difficult-to-pass stools, and people suffering from constipation-predominant irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) are particularly prone to having small stools. A high-fiber diet or regular use of a bulking agent obtained through your

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clinician will lead to larger, softer stools in most people, making defecation easier.

Smell

The odor of your stool is highly dependent on a number of factors, including how long it's been sitting in your colon, your diet, medications, or the presence of infection. Bacterial imbalance (dysbiosis) in the GI tract and undigested food matter can also lead to a change in odor. The most common cause of a malodorous stool is bacterial fermentation of the food in your intestines that produces foul-smelling sulfide compounds and may indicate the need for a digestive aid. For most people, a bad smelling stool is simply a byproduct of the beans they had for dinner the night before.



Shade

The color of stool can vary dramatically and can also be a clue as to whether various disease states are present. Normal stool is brown due to its composition: bacteria, water, bile, broken-down red blood cells and indigestible plant matter like cellulose, along with small amounts of protein and fat.

Red stool is most worrisome as it indicates bleeding in the lower GI tract from conditions like hemorrhoids or diverticulosis, or more serious conditions like rectal cancer.

Red stool can also be caused by ingesting red food coloring or beets. While it should always be reported, it's not always an ominous sign.

Green stool can occur with rapid transit through the intestines where bile doesn't have a chance to be broken down to its final brown color. It

may indicate ingestion of leafy greens or iron therapy.

Yellow stool can be the result of gallbladder dysfunction which causes improper bile function. In addition to causing diarrhea, different types of infection in the GI tract, may cause changes in stool color.

White stool can be a sign of fat malabsorption, as with pancreatitis and pancreatic cancer. Mucus in the stool can give it a whitish appearance and may be

due to inflammation or benign conditions like IBS.

Black stool should trigger a search for bleeding from the upper part of the GI tract (esophagus, stomach or small intestine), but can also be seen with iron therapy and heavy meat consumption.

Light-appearing clay-colored stools are characteristic of liver disease and decreased bile output, but can also be caused by antacids containing aluminum hydroxide.

Vitamins and supplements commonly cause changes in urine color but may also change stool color.

Stool may indicate the presence of a disease or something as simple as the need for a digestive enzyme or probiotic. While we may not always want to talk about our stool, it does give important clues to your healthcare provider. I understand it's a delicate subject, but take a look in the bowl and pay close attention.

This readily available living tissue sample provides useful information that can help you and your clinician chart a course to your best health.