

Nancy's note:

It seems that my whole life has become about poop. I scoop up after my dogs, Max and Toby while in the yard and on walks, clean out the litter box, discuss and examine poop all day long, and even compare notes on the subject with my husband when traveling. As I go through my days I am surprised by the overwhelming interest in colonics and how people seem so relieved to have someone to talk to about their pooping or digestive problems. Most conversations lead to the appearance of poop and in this article I will give a brief explanation to the color and texture of this often embarrassing end result of a function of our body. Our poop may be as useful at assessing our health as taking our temperature or blood pressure.

"People can tell a measure of their health by their bowel movement," says Ted Loftness, M.D., an internist in Litchfield, MN. "Nothing is so overrated as sex and so underrated as a good bowel movement."

Have fun with this.

What is Poop?

Have you ever wondered what poop actually is? About 75% of your average poop is water which is absorbed out of the fecal material as it passes through the large intestine. So the longer you take to "go," the drier your poop will be.

The remaining 25% is comprised of dead bacteria that helped us digest our food, living and dead bacteria, protein, undigested food residue (also known as fiber), waste material from food, cellular linings, fats, cholesterol, salts, protein, and secretions released from the liver and the intestines (such as bile and mucus).

What Makes a Healthy Poop?

Your feces are a clear indicator of the health of your gastrointestinal tract. Dr. Mehmet Oz says, "At the end of the day you can analyze your body really effectively by looking at what comes out of your body."

So what should you look for? A healthy poop will be:

- Golden brown, which is due to pigments formed by the bacteria in the gut and bile from the liver. You want to make sure the color is normal because that tells you a lot about what's going on in your gastrointestinal tract (more on color below).
- Formed into one long shape. Dr. Michael Levitt, an Australian colorectal surgeon who has written a book called *The Bowel Book*, says that the healthy human stool resembles the shape and consistency (although not the same color) of an unripe banana. Dr. Oz says "You don't want [pieces]." Some experts disagree, saying they don't have to be well- formed. Patrick Donovan, N.D., a naturopath in Seattle, WA says "Stools don't have to be well- formed logs. They can disperse in the toilet water; they can break down."
- Nearly odorless.
- About 1 to 2 inches in diameter and 18 inches long.

What About Other Colors and Shapes?

Sometimes we don't see that "golden guru," and are faced with something else instead. Here's some insight into what those other colors and shapes might mean.

- **Black:** Feces can be black if dried blood is present in it from internal bleeding in the upper digestive tract. See a doctor if this is the case.
- **Very Dark Brown:** Drinking wine the night before may result in dark brown poop. This could also be the result of eating too much salt, or not enough vegetables.

- **Yellow:** One condition that can cause yellow poop is an infection known as giardia, a dangerous infection that can spread to others. Another cause of yellow poop may be a condition known as Gilbert's syndrome. See your doctor if you are consistently seeing yellow poop.
- **Green:** Babies often have green poop when they are given food for the first time. Children may have green or blue poop from certain illnesses or from ingesting food colorings. Adults may also have green poop if they eat large amounts of green, leafy vegetables with not enough grains and salts, or if they eat large amounts of foods with green food coloring. Light green poop may indicate excessive sugar in the diet. Green feces can also occur with diarrhea if bile salts pass through the intestine unchanged. Again, see a doctor if you are concerned!
- **White/pale:** Feces can appear white or pale after drinking barium sulfate, which is often given to patients getting an X-ray of the digestive tract. A white or pale stool may also be an indication of problems with the gallbladder or liver.
- **Red:** Bright red in the feces may be indicative of active bleeding, possibly the result of hemorrhoids. A magenta color may result from eating intense red food coloring, or red foods such as beets.
- **Pencil-thin and ribbon like:** a polyp, growth or fecal impaction that narrows the passage for the stool.
- **Large and floating, with greasy film on toilet water:** Malabsorption—your digestive system isn't getting the full nutritional use of food.
- **Loose, watery, sometimes with undigested foodstuffs:** Diarrhea. Possible causes are food poisoning, lactose intolerance, antibiotics, antacids, dietary changes, travel, anxiety, stress, inflammatory bowel disease, or IBS
- **Small, hard, round pellets:** Constipation—even if you're defecating frequently. Possible causes are eating too much dry food, including protein, and not enough vegetables and raw foods, laxative abuse. Worries, or irritable bowel syndrome.
- **Really Bad Smelling:** An imbalance of intestinal bacteria or eating too much animal protein, which can putrefy in your digestive tract.

How Often Should I Poop?

Ah - the big question! Experts disagree on how often a person should poop. The National Institute for Diabetes, Kidney, and Digestive Diseases says three times a week is normal and healthy for some people. According to Ayurveda, an ancient Indian healing system, once a day is ideal. Other experts advocate once or twice a day, while still others say a person should have a bowel movement within two to three hours of a major meal- -or two to three times a day. So you can see that it really depends on who you talk to. My personal opinion is that you above all want to be regular in your pooping schedule, and that one to two healthy poops a day is ideal.

When someone poops four times a day or more and the poop has a liquid consistency, this is referred to as diarrhea. When someone poops less than daily and the poop is hard, dry, and difficult to pass, this is known as constipation.

If you feel like you are not pooping enough, or pooping too much it may be time for internal cleansing and balancing. This can be done with in a variety of ways: colonics, sweating, reflexology, and herbal cleansing kits.

What's the Deal with Corn???

It's funny, so it's ok to laugh. But most people I know have experienced it and they ask why it is that when you eat corn, the next time you poop there it is again! There are a couple of reasons for this. One is that most of us do not thoroughly chew our food. Another interesting tidbit I've learned is that there is an outer coating on corn that is made up of indigestible cellulose. This outer coating slips off the inner kernel and, since it's indigestible, passes through the gut intact. It then emerges looking like a whole kernel, even though it's just the outer skin. The inside of the kernel is starchy and digestible, and that is the part that we succeed in chewing and digesting.

Well, hopefully you know now a lot more about this important topic. And that's the scoop on poop!

The information in this article is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.