

Ask Leyla: Bowel Movements: What's regular?



Q: A lot of health gurus brag that they move their bowels three times daily. It seems one consistent bowel movement around the same time every day seems more natural.

How important do you think it is to move your bowels three times a day, instead of just once? To me it seems like those health gurus are probably eating too much fiber.

A: The definition of bowel regularity differs for everyone. For some, having three bowel movements a day is normal, yet for others it could be as few as three times a week (about every other day). What's important is that the individual doesn't feel constipated—bloated, “backed up” or has a feeling of incomplete evacuation moving their bowels (*more on constipation in next week's newsletter!*)

For someone who has a bowel movement around the same time every day that's comfortable and predictable, it isn't necessary to increase their frequency. There is a such thing as *too much fiber*, which may be equivalent to “eating rope and yanking it through” (I heard this line in a movie many years ago—the name of which I don't recall). Too much fiber can increase bloating, and not taking enough water with additional fiber (i.e., bran cereal, Metamucil) can actually *cause* constipation.

Speeding up GI transit time in an effort to increase bowel frequency also has its drawbacks. The opportunity to properly digest food and absorb micronutrients can be greatly diminished, leading to deficiencies. Optimal transit time is generally 12-24 hours, so a bowel movement a day could be called the norm.

The quality of fecal matter is an important indicator of bowel health. The **Bristol Stool Chart** provides a good visual of seven stool types so you can gauge where you are in terms of bowel health.

So having a bowel movement after every meal isn't *necessary* as some might suggest—unless that's your natural bowel frequency. As long as you have bowel regularity and your stool registers a Type 3 or 4 most of the time on the chart above, it's all good.

And remember, NEVER ignore Nature's call.

To your health!

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