

Blushing before Flushing

By Suze Hargraves

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Today we're going to talk about one of those taboo topics that is a favorite of the TV Dr. OZ. Call it whatever you want: bowel movements, stool, caca, number two, pooh, dodo or whatever else floats your boat but today we're talking about poop. Now, don't be shy. This is information you need so stop blushing and read on.

Talking to your healthcare provider about the color and consistency of bowel movements may seem like something you'd rather avoid. In truth your bowels have a lot to say about your health. There are essentially four areas to watch: frequency, color, size and shape and yes, even odor.

How often you "go" is a personal thing. Everyone is different. On average most people go once or twice a day, however this may not be normal for you. What's important is knowing what's "regular" for you and reporting variances to your healthcare provider. Laxatives should only be used when either recommended by a medical professional or used for only a very short period. Laxative abuse can lead to serious complications. If you or someone you know takes laxatives frequently please visit www.nationaleatingdisorders.org.

If constipation is an issue, fiber could be your answer. According to Dr. Michael Picco, Mayo Clinic gastroenterologist, "Fiber supplements make stool soft, which can ease constipation. If you take fiber supplements, be sure to drink plenty of water or other fluids every day. Otherwise fiber supplements can actually make your constipation worse. Also, add fiber to your diet slowly to avoid problems with gas." As always, never add a supplement to your diet without speaking to your healthcare provider. Some foods that add fiber to your diet are beans, most fruits, artichokes and whole grains. For a more complete list visit <http://dietaryfiberguide.com/>.

Color offers important health clues when it comes to stools. Your stools are usually brown because of bile produced in the liver. Bile is an important part of the digestive process. Pale or grayish stool can be a sign of trouble and should be addressed. Black, red or bowel movements streaked with red should be brought to your healthcare provider's attention immediately. Although not always, serious, conditions resulting in these colors require attention. Green is a color, although odd, that is usually not a cause of great concern. A hearty salad takes a three day journey through your digestive system and may result in startling green poop. Unless it continues, it's usually just a cause for a bit of a giggle.

Size, shape and odor are not usually causes for concern unless there is a persistent change. Distinct changes in size or shape that last more than a few days should be addressed as causes can range from the mundane to serious. As for odor, WebMD gives us this information to defend a less than pleasant aroma after your visit to the bathroom, "Your intestines are swarming with trillions upon trillions of bacteria that enhance digestive and metabolic processes. They are also the reason why poop smells -- a direct result of the bacterial activity in your GI tract. So although it's no bed of roses, it is normal for your bowel movements to stink."

Well, there you have it, the poop on poop. (Yes, I actually said that. You knew it was coming didn't you?) Now stop blushing and pay attention to what you're flushing.