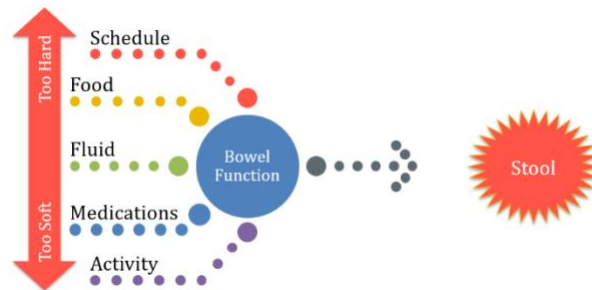









## Tips for Healthy Bowels

The key to a successful bowel routine is the stool consistency. When the stool is the right consistency, you are able to effectively empty your bowels without other bowel symptoms. Stool consistency is determined by the maintenance of a bathroom routine, eating enough fiber balanced with enough water, and maintaining activity.



The [Bristol Stool Chart](#) categorizes stool based on firmness. This tool helps patients identify their stool consistency and communicate with healthcare providers about their bowel health. When the stool is too hard, people can have incomplete bowel movements and develop constipation. Alternatively, when the stool is too soft people can have incomplete bowel movements with symptoms of frequency and incontinence. The ideal stool consistency is between a Bristol Stool type 2 and type 4. By reviewing your current bowel consistency, you can determine if you need to make lifestyle adjustments to reduce the risk of bowel dysfunction.

### Bristol Stool Chart

Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
Type 2		Sausage-shaped but lumpy
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on its surface
Type 4		Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
Type 5		Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (passed easily)
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces. <b>Entirely Liquid</b>

Each person's method to evacuate the bowel may be different; however, the success of a bowel movement (BM) is dependent on the stool consistency. Hard stool is harder for the

bowel to move and can lead to constipation, incontinence and rectal bleeding. On the other hand, soft stool can lead to incomplete bowel movements and fecal incontinence.

It is also important to identify your triggers for constipation and/or incontinence and the tools to maintain bowel regularity. Until your bowel routine is established, keep a record to help identify any positive or negative trends. Include the frequency of bowel movements, Bristol stool number and if there are any bowel accidents.

### **Bowel Routine**

The body works best on a routine. Bowel schedules programs are routines to "train the bowel" to effectively empty at the right time without accidents.

- Schedule time in the morning or evening every day or every other day. Try for 30 minutes after a meal while your body is digesting food. Your body has a natural reflex during digestion to increase bowel motility and promote bowel emptying. Try drinking 1 - 2 cups of hot liquid such as coffee or tea 30 minutes before your scheduled bathroom time.
- Allow 10 minutes in the sitting position for the bowel program. Positioning does help. Mimic the squatting position to activate your natural bowel reflex. While sitting on the toilet, prop your feet up on a stool to position your knees higher than the hips.
- Visualize or lightly palpate the left lower abdomen to promote stool movement.
- Relax, read a magazine, light a candle, play music, etc. Stress decreases digestion and limits bowel activity.
- Stick to your scheduled even if you do not have a bowel movement.
- Keep a packed bag in the car with a change of clothes, bowel program supplies, cleaning wipes and waste bag for emergencies.

## Hydration

Dehydration is the most common cause of constipation. Water works with fiber to make up your stool consistency. The recommended amount of non-caffeinated fluids water is eight 8-ounce glasses (2 liters) per day unless instructed otherwise by your doctor. Slowly increase the amount of water you drink a day while recording the frequency of bowel movements, Bristol stool number and any bowel accidents to help identify trends. It may take several weeks to see the benefit of adding water to your diet with better stool consistency and more effective bowel movements.

## Fiber

Fiber is in all plant-based food. It improves digestion and the movement of stool through the bowel. Fiber must have water to work. It pulls the water into the bowel to regulate and soften stool. It is just as important to stay hydrated as it is to eat fiber-rich foods.

There are two types of fiber: soluble and insoluble fiber.

1. **Soluble Fiber** breaks down during digestion. It absorbs water to form a gel-like consistency to allow for softer stool and regulate digestion. Soluble fiber is typically found in:
  - Legumes: dried peas and beans
  - Oats, rye and barley
  - Some fruits, especially apples, bananas and berries
  - Some vegetables, such as potatoes/yams, broccoli and carrots
  - Psyllium seed and other commercial fiber supplements

Nutrition Facts	
about 9 servings per container	
Serving size 1 Cup (59g)	
Amount per serving	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>190</b>
*% Daily Values*	
Total Fat 1g	1%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
Polyunsaturated Fat 0g	
Monounsaturated Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 210mg	9%
Total Carbohydrate 46g	17%
Dietary Fiber 7g	25%
Total Sugars 18g	
Includes 9g Added Sugars	18%
Protein 5g	
Vitamin D 4mcg	20%
Calcium 25mg	0%
Iron 4.4mg	20%
Potassium 390mg	8%
Thiamin	10%
Riboflavin	10%
Niacin	10%
Vitamin B <sub>6</sub>	10%
Folate 80 mcg DFE (48mcg folic acid)	20%
Vitamin B <sub>12</sub>	10%
Phosphorus	20%
Magnesium	20%
Zinc	10%
Copper	10%

\* The % Daily Value tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.



2. **Insoluble Fiber** is "roughage" because it does not break down during digestion. This allows it to add bulk to stool which helps it move through the GI tract and establish regularity. Insoluble fiber is typically found in:

- Whole Grain foods- whole wheat bread, brown/wild rice, whole wheat pasta
- Bran
- Nuts and seeds
- Vegetables, especially those with skins or peels
- Fruits, especially those with skins or peels

The recommended amount of fiber to eat per day is 25 - 30 grams. Add fiber slowly to your diet. Aim for a mix of insoluble and soluble fiber in your daily diet. Try to include at least one fiber-containing food with each meal. Remember that fiber must have water to work, so hydrate.

### **Activity**

Regular activity improves digestion. It increases blood flow, water absorption and muscle contractions throughout your bowel to break down food and move stool. Activity ranges from walking, changing positions, massage, a range of motion activities and stretching.

### **What Can Trigger Changes in Bowel Regularity?**

- Not staying on your bowel schedule
- Not completely emptying your bowel
- Change in medications for pain, muscle spasms or urinary symptoms
- The foods listed below may cause GI upset and may lead to incontinence. Be cautious with these foods until you know how your body tolerates them.
  - Fried or greasy/high fat food
  - Spicy foods
  - Caffeinated drinks
  - Alcohol
  - Lactose