

Digestion, Stool Consistency, and Your Health

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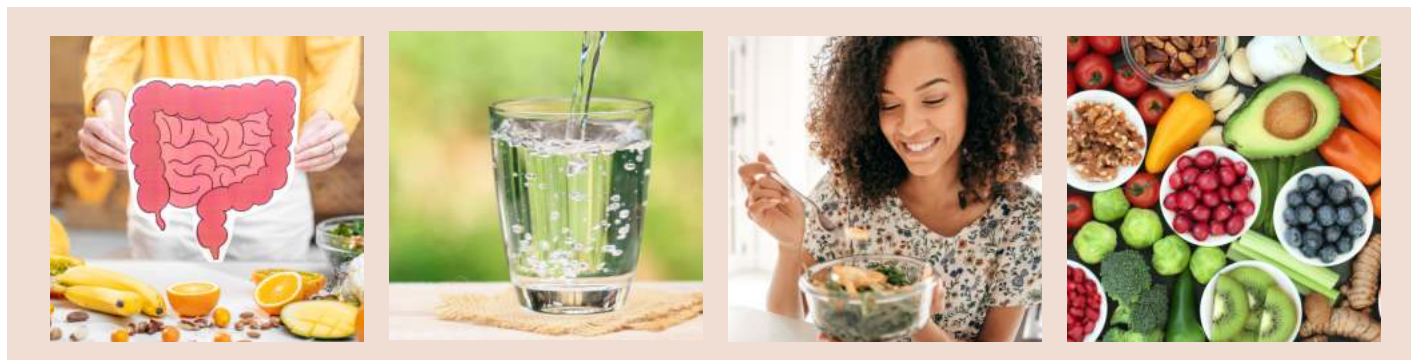
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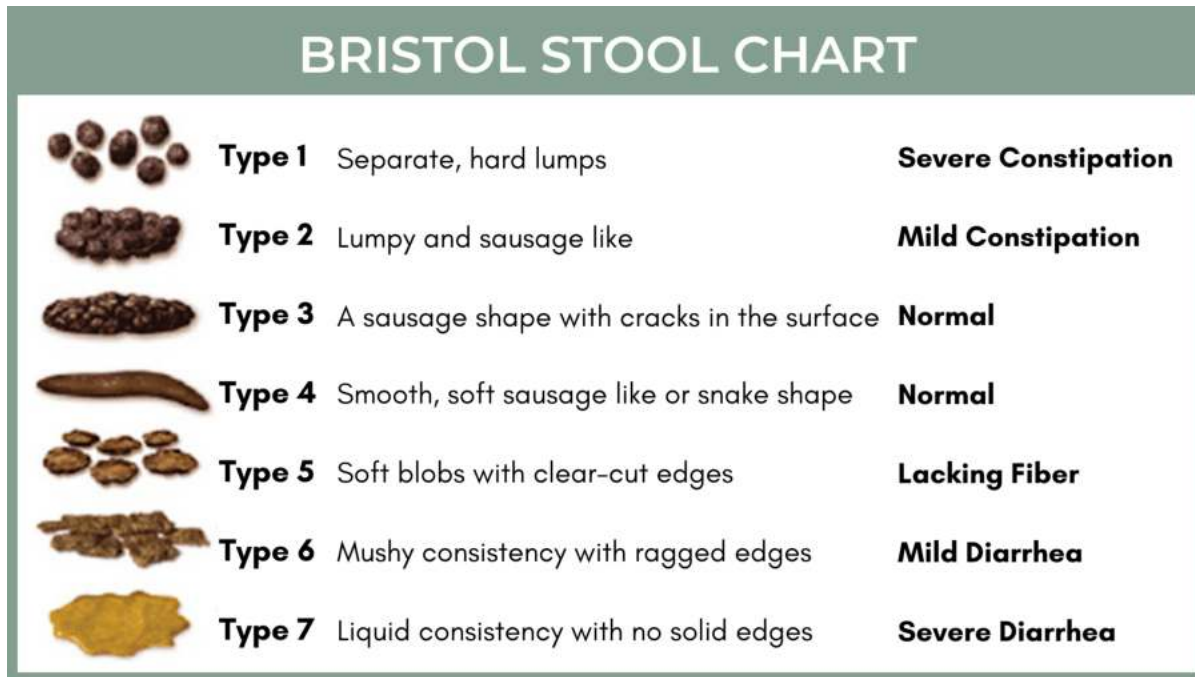
Digestion, Stool Consistency, and Your Health

One of the principles of naturopathy is to use non-invasive means to address and support the individual. Since we cannot directly see what is happening inside the body, naturopaths must learn to observe physically manifested signs. One presentation that naturopaths can ask about and discuss with clients to better understand their health and wellness is their digestion and bowel movements. One tool that can help facilitate this sometimes awkward conversation is the Bristol Stool Chart. Identifying the bowel type with this chart, in conjunction with a client's health history, foundational choices, and current symptoms, naturopaths may guide on what body systems could benefit from support.

The Bristol Stool Chart was created in 1997 by Dr. Kenneth Heaton of Bristol University alongside 66 volunteers.[1] They completed the chart by observing their stool while changing their diets and tracked the frequency of bowel movements and the fecal matter shape and weight. Through their research, they discovered seven different stool types, ranging from constipation to diarrhea. In the middle of these extremes is the ideal stool quality that represents optimal bowel function. Each stool type reveals insights about the client's health. Read on to determine what the body could be trying to tell you or your client through the seven different types of fecal matter it produces.



The Bristol Stool Chart



To understand the types of elimination, digestion and its components must first be explained. Digestion is the process by which substances we consume, like food, drinks, or supplements, are chemically changed so that the body can absorb the available nutrients and eliminate waste. Digestion begins when we chew our food, mixing in saliva that provides hydration and initiates chemical changes through the enzymes it contains. Then, food travels through the alimentary canal, which includes the mouth, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, and large intestine. The autonomic nervous system controls the movement of substances through the digestive tract. Acidic gastric juices containing enzymes drive the process by chemically changing the matter it encounters, and the stomach muscles physically churn the partially digested food, which is now called chyme. As the progression continues through the tract, bile, pancreatic enzymes, and gut bacteria also play an important role in digestion.

Type 1 and 2 in the Bristol Stool chart represent bowel movements associated with constipation. These stool types are likely harder to pass and may indicate that more nutrients or water is needed. Types 3 and 4 are healthy, ideal stools. These stools are soft and easy to pass. They are likely the result of proper nutrition, digestion, water consumption, and fiber intake. Types 5, 6, and 7 are loose stools. Type 5 may indicate that more fiber is needed. At the extreme, in Types 6 and 7, one is experiencing diarrhea, which suggests the body is eliminating a toxin or that enzyme support may be beneficial. Undigested foods in Types 6 and 7 may also indicate that the body may need supplemental enzymes.

Supporting Digestion

The consistency of each stool type results from the transit time of the food, drink, or supplements through the colon.[2] When the process moves too slowly, stool sits in the intestines too long, resulting in constipation. Substances that go through the digestive process too quickly can result in loose stool. Ideal stools can indicate that what was consumed was adequately absorbed and contained enough water to pass easily through the intestines.

The reasons why the body processes what we consume and produces a certain stool type vary. Underlying illness, the kind of food eaten, food sensitivities, medications, lifestyle choices, and the state of the digestive system can all play a factor.[2] In addition, diagnosed or underlying conditions, such as Chron's disease, can also influence digestive function and stool consistency. Symptoms of a digestive disorder include constipation, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting. Schedule an appointment with your healthcare professional if you have digestive concerns.



General healthy digestion depends on three factors: food intake, hydration, and enzymes. Supporting the liver also plays a key role in nurturing digestion. To nourish the liver, limit or avoid alcohol and fatty, fried, or processed foods. You should also avoid pesticides by washing all produce or choosing organic options. Toxins can also be detrimental to the liver and should be avoided in food, fragrances, and home products as much as possible. Certain supplements and medications can also be harmful to the liver.[3] To learn which of these substances are identified as being toxic to the liver, visit <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK547852/>. Always follow your physician's recommendations and consult them if you have any concerns.

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To support overall digestion, first, consider taking a food sensitivity test. Test kits can be ordered online and mailed to a lab for processing and interpretation, or you can work with your doctor to order one. Once you know what foods don't work for you, then you can put into place some of the following tips:

- 1) **Avoid artificial sweeteners and foods with artificial ingredients. Aim to eat whole, fibrous foods and meats without any additives. Foods with Omega-3 fatty acids can also be beneficial.**[4]
- 2) **Consider taking prebiotics, probiotics, and digestive enzymes if you aren't getting enough from your diet or require a specific enzyme.**
- 3) **Drink enough water, so your urine is mostly clear with a tinge of pale straw yellow color, roughly half of your weight in ounces of water every day.**
- 4) **Exercise and practice self-care techniques that promote destressing your body, such as meditation and prayer, so the “rest and digest” process can properly occur.**[4]
- 5) **Eat and drink slowly to avoid gas and burping. Chew thoroughly to encourage food to pass easily through the digestive system and to avoid overeating.**[5]

Conclusion

Fecal matter can give traditional naturopaths the information they need to make supportive recommendations. Using the Bristol Stool Chart, we can gain insights into the client's digestive system and associated organs. You can help improve your overall well-being by supporting the digestive process through a healthy diet, drinking enough water, consuming enzymes, and recognizing what certain bowel signs indicate.

Consider taking our Certified Natural Health Professional program to learn more about digestion and how to support the individual and their health from the inside out. To learn more, call 800-428-0408, option 2, or visit <https://trinityschool.org/program/cnhp>.



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References

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