



# The Wellness Family

Dr. Heather Keeps You Informed

## Healthy Poops

Nick Haslam, a Professor of Psychology at the University of Melbourne, recently wrote that it's time for psychologists to stop ignoring excrement. A UK survey in 2010 ranked the flushing toilet as the 9<sup>th</sup> greatest invention of all time (sliced bread ranked 70<sup>th</sup>). Granted, it's not the best topic of conversation and, with the exception of talking to your doctor, it's probably not something you frequently discuss. However, the truth is your body provides you a way to gauge how it's functioning every day, if you know how to interpret the signs.

### Take a Look

Anish Sheth, M.D., a Yale gastroenterologist and the author of *What's Your Poo Telling You?* says, "What comes out tells you a lot about what's going on inside." Dr. Craig Maxwell, who is board certified in Family Medicine, Integrative Medicine and Osteopathic Medicine, says that people who quickly flush, clean up and leave the room are missing some vital clues about the state of their health.

It may seem disgusting, embarrassing or even taboo, but taking a moment to look before flushing can be informative.

### Texture or Consistency

The texture or consistency of poop may be a sign of what's going on inside:

- Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, mushy – this is on the edge of normal but is on its way to becoming diarrhea
- Watery, no solid pieces, all liquid – this is diarrhea which is probably caused by some sort of infection since this is the body's way of cleaning itself: make sure to drink lots of clear liquids to replace the fluids lost otherwise this will result in dehydration
- Soft and sticks to the side of the toilet bowl – this is the presence of too much oil, which is possibly the result of an improper absorption of fats and could be a sign of disease such as chronic pancreatitis
- Soft blocks with clear-cut edges – not too bad, pretty normal for someone who is pooping multiple times a day
- Separate hard lumps like nuts – this is a sign of a lack of fiber and fluids: drink more water and eat more vegetables
- Sausage-shaped but lumpy – not as serious as separate hard lumps: still drink more water and eat more vegetables
- Sausage-shaped but with cracks on the surface – this is normal but the cracks signify the need for more water
- Sausage-shaped, smooth and soft – optimal poop

The only shape or consistency that could be a concern is pencil-thin stools for more than a week. Skinny bowel movements can indicate a serious problem, especially if they become thinner over several weeks. If this occurs, requesting a colonoscopy may be wise.

Something else to consider: stool that is floating. This is typically harmless but may be a sign of either too much gas, a gastrointestinal infection or malabsorption. Floating stool is not a reason to contact a primary care provider unless it is accompanied by sudden weight loss, dizziness or fever.



*Taking a moment to look before flushing can be informative.*

### Color

In most cases, excrement should be brown. While diet may sometimes result in a change of color (for instance, blueberries may turn bowels blue and beets will frequently cause a red tint) poop is supposed to be brown. Colors other than brown may indicate a health issue.

- White or clay-colored stools may indicate a lack of bile in the stool – this may be caused by insufficient bile output or obstruction due to conditions such as gallstones, parasitic infection, hepatitis, chronic pancreatitis, etc. However, medications such as antacids, Pepto-Bismol or Kaopectate may also cause this color. Remember that stomach acids are an important part of digestion, and antacids taken too frequently may actually cause heartburn as well as digestion and elimination issues
- Green stool is typically caused by overactive or increased bowel transit time, meaning the bile doesn't have time to change from green to brown. This may be caused by food poisoning, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, irritable bowel syndrome or other diseases, as well as alcoholism and the side effects of some medications including antibiotics or over the counter drugs
- Yellow stool is primarily caused by an inability to digest fat – inadequate digestive enzyme production from the pancreas, celiac disease, cystic fibrosis or intestinal infections

- Black, tarry stools are typically caused by bleeding somewhere in the digestive tract (esophagus, stomach, duodenum, small intestine, colon) – this may also be a symptom of Crohn’s disease, ulcerative colitis, intestinal infection or diverticulosis, and gastritis, or it could be indicative of cancer; however, black licorice, blueberries, beets, tomatoes, lead, iron pills and medications like Pepto-Bismol may also cause this appearance
- Red stool is typically caused by intestinal bleeding – although the stool is not usually entirely red, the causes are similar to those of black, tarry stool but may also be caused by food coloring and certain dietary supplements

## Baby Poops

As with adults and children, baby poops can be a sign of how the body is functioning, but it is different for breastfed as opposed to bottle fed infants.

- Breastfed babies typically have yellow poop that’s speckled with little seeds like fancy mustard and will poop more than once a day – usually after they are fed
- Bottle fed babies have tan, yellow or greenish poop and will typically need a diaper changed once a day

Be aware that a breastfed baby may absorb the nutrients in their mother’s milk more completely so it’s not completely uncommon for a breastfed baby to go a few days without a bowel movement. However, if they’re straining or uncomfortable this could be a sign of constipation. Babies that have bloody stools or mucus in their stools should be taken to their primary care provider.

## Stress Concerns

Studies in the fields of psychosomatic medicine and gastroenterology have shown that many bowel complaints have a large psychological component. One example is Irritable Bowel Syndrome or IBS. This common condition is characterized by chronic or alternating diarrhea and constipation, sometimes accompanied by bloating, discomfort and abdominal pain. Studies have shown that it’s difficult to confirm a cause, but those with IBS tend to score high when tested for neuroticism and find that many of their health issues have a basis in anxiety and depression.

Sufferers of IBS may have problems with self-assertion and often report histories of abuse.

Studies in neurogastroenterology are beginning to uncover some of the roots of IBS and find that it may be tied to the enteric nervous system, the “second brain” that controls the internal organs, especially the intestines.

## Medication Concerns

Constipation and other bowel issues have been linked to some prescription and over the counter medications. For instance, opioid based pain relievers may cause constipation. Antibiotics may destroy the good bacteria in the bowels while going after the bad bacteria, so consider taking probiotics after a course of any antibiotics.

A bigger concern, however, may be over-the-counter laxatives being used for constipation. Oral laxatives may interfere with absorption of nutrients but that’s not as worrisome as what happens when they’re taken too much. Eventually the body becomes dependent upon them and they must be taken even more frequently; however, with greater use the body can become immune to the drug and they stop working all together. Before beginning to take any laxative try lifestyle changes first: eat more fiber-rich foods, drink more water and exercise regularly. Even going for a 20-minute walk once a day for a week can help to regulate bowel movements.

## The Chiropractic Factor

Since the central nervous system controls all of the systems including digestion and elimination, bowel issues may be related to vertebral subluxation. If the signals from the brain aren’t getting to the muscles, organs and glands (including the intestines) then the result may be constipation or diarrhea.

Many parents of children and newborns have reported back that after a few gentle adjustments their little ones were able to have normal, healthy bowel movements. It’s not unusual to have a constipated baby fill their diaper immediately following an adjustment.

Your Family Wellness Chiropractor understands that a healthy functioning nervous system helps the entire body function better.



*Dear Patient,  
Dr. Heather is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family’s overall health and wellness.*

### This newsletter is provided to you by:

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