

Bowels: What is Normal?

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Being 'regular' is a way of describing good bowel habits or normal bowel function. What does regular mean? What is normal? It's common for people to empty their bowel once a day, although it's still normal to be more or less often. Being regular really means that soft yet well-formed bowel motions are easily passed and that this happens anywhere from 1–3 times a day to 3 times a week. The bowel usually wants to empty about 30 minutes after a meal (com-only breakfast), but this can vary from person to person.

The **Bristol Stool Chart** (page 2) shows 7 categories of stool. Every person will have different bowel habits, but the important thing is that your stools are soft and easy to pass.

The type/size/shape of stool depends on the time it spends in your colon. What you see in the toilet is basically the result of the foods you eat, the amount and type of fluid you drink, medications that you are taking, and your lifestyle.

As the Bristol Stool Chart shows below:

- Type 1–2 indicate constipation
- Type 3–4 are ideal stools as they are easier to pass
- Type 5–7 may indicate diarrhea and urgency








There's more to good bowel function than just being regular. For example, you should be able to:

- Hold on for a short time after you feel the first urge to go to the toilet – this allows time to get there and remove clothing without accidental loss.
- Have a bowel movement within about a minute of sitting down on the toilet.
- Have a bowel movement easily and without pain – ideally you shouldn't be straining on the toilet or struggling to pass a bowel motion that is hard and dry.
- Completely empty your bowel when you have a bowel movement—you shouldn't have to go back to the toilet soon after you get up.

People who have bowel movements at the wrong time or in the wrong place may be experiencing poor bowel control (incontinence). They may also pass gas (wind) when they don't want to. Poor bowel control is more common than you may think – affecting about 1 in 20 people, men and women, older and young. Sometimes those with poor bowel control also have poor bladder control and may leak urine.

Visit your doctor to rule out serious medical conditions, and then see a **WPTI** Pelvic Health therapist to get you started on lifestyle changes and specific exercises for muscle control and coordination.

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. Entirely Liquid