

Everybody Poops, So Let's Talk About It: 11 Tips To Be More "Regular"

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Stool, bowel movements, poop—it's the topic that has made us all giggle since our parents first read us *Everybody Poops*. But it's true: everybody does, and no matter how much the topic might make you squirm, our bowel movements can give a lot of insight into our bodies. "Your digestive system is responsible for influencing total body health," explained Heather Hanks, M.S., a nutritionist with [InstaPot Life](#). "It encompasses most of your immune system, produces neurotransmitters that influence brain health, and houses your microbiome. Regularity is a sign of a properly functioning digestive system." If the eyes are the window to the soul, poops are the window to your digestive system.

Now that you know *why* you should be regular, let's talk about *how* to be more regular. If you're not going at least once every 24 hours consistently, you could probably use a little bowel movement makeover (yeah, same). I asked nutritionists, doctors, and gut health experts how we can all get a little bit more regular. Here are 11 things to try for healthier bowel movements and better digestion:

1. Drink more water

Drinking good ol' H₂O is basically a cliché at this point. Hydration seems to be the cure-all for any health woe or wellness boost, so it's no surprise that it's also crucial for keeping bowels moving. "When we're dehydrated, our bodies will pull hydration from the colon to support the body's processes," explained Erica Zellner, a certified nutrition specialist and health coach at [Parsley Health](#). "This makes stool harder and more difficult to pass." In other words, think of water as your body's flushing system. Without enough water, the digestive system can't move as efficiently, and stool is harder to pass (AKA that dreaded constipation). Zellner recommends aiming for half of your body weight in ounces per day to make sure you're drinking enough.

2. Eat your fruits and veggies

“Eat your veggies” is not just the annoying reminder your mom used to repeat at each meal; it’s also the secret to a healthy digestive system and regular stools. “Eating whole foods that contain natural sources of fiber such as fresh fruits and vegetables is key to staying regular and supporting digestive health,” Hanks suggested. Fiber (which is also found in whole grains, legumes, and other plant foods besides fruit and vegetables) is a type of carbohydrate that the body can’t digest, so it passes through the intestine and helps push waste out of the body. If protein is the key nutrient for healthy muscles, fiber is the key nutrient for a healthy gut. Try high-fiber produce like pears, avocados, berries, artichokes, Brussels sprouts, and chickpeas.

In addition to fiber, fruits and veggies are powerful foods for the digestive system because they contain many other beneficial ingredients as well. “In addition to being high in fiber, fruits and vegetables contain antioxidants and a high water content that reduce inflammation, flush toxins, and promote digestive health,” Hank said.

4. Take (or eat) probiotics

Cara Harbstreet, M.S., R.D., L.D., swears probiotics are the secret to better regularity and overall gut health, and since they’re literally good bacteria for the gut, it makes perfect sense that they affect bowel movements. “By incorporating probiotics into your daily routine, your gut will be happier,” she said. “Consuming products rich in probiotics can support the recolonization of friendly bacteria and may limit the growth of other bacteria in your large intestine.” The gut needs to be in tip-top shape to have healthy bowel movements, and having a good amount of good bacteria in the gut is key to keeping it healthy. Talk to your doctor about taking a probiotic supplement or try foods that naturally have probiotics like sauerkraut, kimchi, miso, and fermented veggies.

5. Manage stress

Now that you know there’s a relationship between the nervous system and regular bowel movements, it’s probably no surprise that stress can be a

major factor in any constipation. “When you’re highly stressed, your body will not feel safe enough to have a bowel movement,” explained Zellner. While it may sound silly to think of how safe the body feels when trying to poop, it makes a lot of sense biologically. If we were being chased by a tiger, the digestive system would slow down so that we wouldn’t have to go to the bathroom (or a bush?) while running. These days, the threat of tigers is relatively low, and stress looks more like work deadlines and busy to-do lists, but the body doesn’t know the difference.

To get curious about how stress is affecting your digestive system, start noticing when you’re less regular. Is it during a stressful time? This might be TMI, but I realized I was getting backed up during weekdays but could go easily on weekends. My doctor suggested that it might be because I was feeling busy as soon as I woke up from Monday through Friday, so my body didn’t feel like it *could* go, while my mind (and body) was able to slow down on weekends. My doctor’s rec was a slow morning routine and regular meditation to manage stress. “Meditation and quality downtime is important to keep the body in the rest-and-digest mode instead of stress mode.” agreed Dr. Alicia Armitstead B.S., D.C., of [Healing Arts NYC](#).

6. Try magnesium citrate

If you have chronic constipation or consistently struggle with irregular bowel movements, your doctor might recommend taking magnesium citrate. Alexandra Trevisan, a functional medicine physician recommended a daily magnesium citrate supplement for ongoing constipation. “It works to relax the nervous system and bowels to get things moving,” she explained. “You can only go to the bathroom in a relaxed state (we call this a parasympathetic state), which magnesium citrate helps to facilitate.” As with any supplement or dietary change, talk to your doctor to find out if magnesium citrate would be beneficial for you, and what dose is best for your body.

7. Create a routine

If your schedule looks different every day, meals are all over the place, and your bedtime or wake-up time is inconsistent, your digestive system might be confused. The truth is that to have regularity with our bowel movements, we need to have regularity in our lives. “Wake up, go to bed,

and eat at the same time every day—including the weekend,” suggested [Varsha Khatri](#), MA, SYT, MCMA, FNTTP, a nutritionist and gut health specialist. “Having a consistent routine establishes healthier circadian rhythms, which will help to establish a regular time to have a daily bowel movement.”

Besides just regular sleeping and eating schedules, you should also have a poop schedule to ensure that your regularity is, well, regular. Zellner suggested finding the same time daily to set aside for a relaxed bowel movement. For example, take some time in the mornings to sit on the toilet and take some deep breaths (even if you don’t feel the need to), so your body starts to understand that it has the time to go.

8. Incorporate healthy fats

If you haven’t gotten the gist by now, what you eat is crucial to how regular you are. Unfortunately, it’s not a coincidence if you get a little backed up on vacations while eating unlimited pasta, alcohol, and desserts (guilty). Besides a high-fiber diet and fruits and vegetables, eating enough healthy fats can also help increase regularity. As [Laura Zea M.S.](#) explained, healthy fats “help your large intestine’s motility. If you are feeling constipated, a diet too low in fats may be responsible.” Eat healthy fats like olive oil, avocados, nuts, and seeds with every meal to avoid getting backed up and help promote regular bowel movements.

9. Switch to room-temperature water

So we’ve already covered that the amount of water you drink is crucial for regularity, but the *temperature* of the water you drink can also make a difference. “One of the best ways to stay regular is switching to room temperature or hot water instead of ice water,” said Dr. Ellie Heintze, ND, LAc, a naturopathic doctor and licensed acupuncturist. “Ice water can be like a shock to the system and might slow digestion, while the body uses warm or room temp water more efficiently.” The most important thing is that your body is staying hydrated, so if ice water feels refreshing and room temperature water just isn’t satisfying, drink whatever water feels best for you. But if you enjoy warm lemon water or don’t mind drinking room-temp, try experimenting to see if it makes any difference for your body.

10. Move your body

Turns out digestion is not just about what you put in your body, but also about the way you move your body. “Exercise helps constipation by lowering the time it takes food to move through the large intestine,” explained Jennifer Robinson, MD, to WebMD. “This limits the amount of water your body absorbs from the stool.” In other words, bowel movements are more likely to be passed easily when exercising consistently. They will also move through the body more quickly. “A sedentary lifestyle can cause digestion disruption,” agreed Lauren Twigge MCN, RDN, LD. “An easy way to support healthy digestion (and stay regular) is by staying active.” Remember this: a sedentary life means sedentary stool!

11. Don't forget to breathe

Yes, your bowel movements might even be affected by the way you breathe. Of course, our bodies know to consistently breathe without having to think about it (thank you, body!). But most of the time, mindless breathing is shallow and doesn't get into the deep belly breathing that helps relieve tension. “Deep breathing helps relax the body and increase blood flow, making it easier to have a bowel movement,” advised Zellner. This is why diaphragmatic breathing is often prescribed to GI patients, and the 4-7-8 technique might help ease constipation. Deep breathing is another way to give your digestive system a little extra love and relieve any stress (even if it's subconscious stress or tension) that might be contributing to constipation.

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