

Happy Bowel Habits

A great bowel movement has three components:

1. Ample time to poo in peace
2. No forcing or straining to get out the poo
3. A feeling of complete emptying when you're done

Beyond that, bowel habits vary greatly. For some people, "normal" is going 3x/day; for others, it's 3x/week. And obviously certain medical conditions, medications, or digestive issues can affect what comes out your rear end and how often. But here are some general tips and tricks to set your bowels up for success. I've summarized them in the form of a simple equation:

Proper Position + Proper Disposition + Performance Assessment

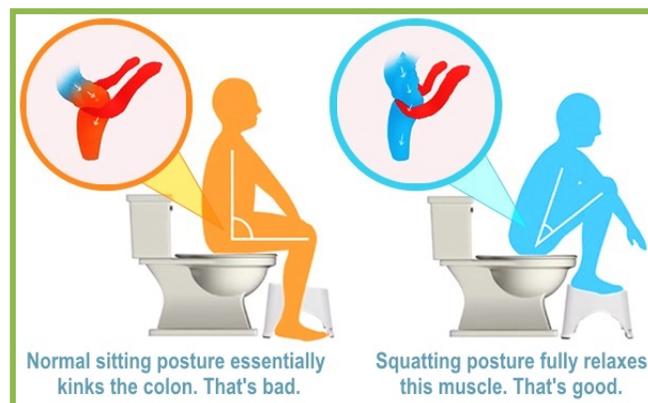
Check it out down below – and happy poo-ing!

DR. J

Proper Position

(Get your knees higher than your hips.)

It's no wonder that squatting has taken the Western pooping world by storm in the last few years: it's the way our bodies are designed to work. Just like a garden hose will get backed up and not function properly when kinked, so too will years of poor poo-ing habits make your bum sad. Basically, we have a muscle that slings around our rectum (where the poo comes out) that creates a kink in our plumbing when we walk or sit on a standard toilet or chair. When we get our knees higher than our hips in a squatting position, that muscle unkinks. (It's called your puborectalis muscle, btw, if you want to impress people at your next cocktail party.) What that un-kinking means is that we're not fighting our own body to get out the poo. Hemorrhoids, constipation, bloating and straining are often ways in which the body communicates that you ought to pay more attention to your bottom, 'cause something isn't working right down there. There are lots of options on the market (just type in: toilet stool), but any step stool more than 7-10" should do. You'll find more detail about proper positioning at www.thepelvicpt.com/resources/, so be sure check it out – but getting knees higher than hips is by far the most important takeaway.



Proper Disposition (Take some deep breaths.)

If you don't have time in your day to sit down on the toilet for a proper poo, we need to talk. If you sit down, but you think the best way to get it all over with quickly is to strain as hard as you can – we also need to have a little chat. If you sit on the toilet so long that your toes go numb and you can watch a whole season of your favorite TV show... oh dear.

What most people don't realize is that a deep breath, one where your belly pooches outward, is actually a lovely little massage for your intestines and helps relax your pelvic floor muscles. Tightening your abdominals (like you do when you strain to push poo out – yeah, I'm talking to you) is actually putting a lot of downward pressure on your pelvic muscles, making them bulge down in ways they don't much like. Those are the muscles that hold up your organs. You push down on them hard enough, and for long enough, and you start having some issues... like organ prolapse, or incontinence, or muscle dysfunction and pain. No good.

Next time you see a dog doing its business, I want you to notice that it doesn't strain or fight its own body to finish the masterwork it just proudly left on your front lawn. There is a slow rhythm to how the poo exits the body, one that you'll discover *if you give yourself the time and space and breath enough to make it happen.*

So try it: next time you're on the toilet, knees higher than your hips and feeling the urge to go, put your hands on your low belly. Inhale for a slow count of 5, belly expanding outward against your hands. Then exhale for 5 counts. Breathe like this while on the porcelain throne – resisting that urge to strain! – perhaps you'll notice how on the inhale there is more material exiting the rectum than on the exhale. It's the way the body works naturally and requires much less effort!

Performance Assessment (Look before you flush.)

As pretty as we are, we're basically just one long tube, stretching from mouth to anus. If you've found limited success with the breathing method above, it's time to take a closer look. Just like 'what goes up, must come down' – what goes in... must come out. The **Bristol Stool Scale** is a fantastic tool to help you assess the quality of your poo: whether you have gut irritation or inflammation, whether you're constipated and need to make changes to your diet, water intake or medication regimen, or whether your digestive system is doing great (that's a 3-4 on the scale). If you find you're still straining, but what comes out looks like a 3 or a 4, recheck your positioning, review some of the pelvic relaxation techniques on our [Resources](#) page, and consider contacting your friendly local pelvic PT.

[Click here for a full-sized Bristol Stool Scale Chart:](#)
take a picture or print it out to keep handy by the toilet!

