



AGING TODAY

Everybody Does it



By Bob Roth, Managing Partner of Cypress HomeCare Solutions

A note of caution to my devoted readers: If you normally sit down to my column while having a meal or snacking, these two activities should be enjoyed independent of one another today. March is national colorectal cancer awareness month so I will dish the scoop on poop. So, don't get flushed, pull up a stool and let's engage in (productive) potty talk.

While I admit it is a bit unrefined and the 8-year-old little boy in me is most certainly giggling, there really is no easier way to discover what's happening inside your body than seeing what comes out of it. It is important to pay attention to your bathroom habits. Equally important, is not obsessing over them.

One of the biggest misconceptions circulated by a popular TV doctor is that there is an ideal result, S-shaped and enters the water like an Olympic diver with minimal splash. The take away was that anything else could indicate some kind of problem. This blanket statement is just incorrect. Everyone's GI tract operates differently based on genetics, hydration, dietary habits, medication, and other ongoing health issues.

On any given day something may be slightly off and certain foods just don't agree with you. If occasionally you don't drink enough water, are on a new medication, or are traveling, your rhythm is off for a short time and usually reverts back to normal in a few days. Don't get your boxers in a bunch, needless worrying is just that.

Better bowel health heeds me to shout out to our inner caveman, a recurring theme. Our paleolithic progenitors could check off the first four bullet points of this list of suggestions:

- exercise regularly
- strive to drink two quarts of water daily

- eat unprocessed, natural foods including fiber-rich vegetables
- avoid artificial sweeteners, fructose, chemical additives, MSG, and excessive caffeine
- boost your intestinal flora by adding naturally fermented foods to your diet-sauerkraut, pickles, and kefir, for example.
- add a probiotic supplement if you're not getting enough good bacteria from your diet
- if you use medication every day, ask your prescribing doctor if it could be affecting your bowel movements
- take action to minimize stress

Interestingly, the stone age squat is the ideal anatomical position for when nature calls. We may have won the birth lottery for living in the modern era of indoor plumbing, but your body is designed to eliminate while squatting.

Sitting on a modern toilet is designed to place your knees at a 90-degree angle to your abdomen while squatting places your knees much closer to your torso. Today's toilet position is unnatural. Squatting changes the relationship of your intestinal organs and musculature which allows for complete emptying without straining.

I strongly recommend placing a stool on the floor designed to fit around the base of the toilet known as the squatty potty. I am pretty sure that the inventor of this simple, yet brilliant device is reading this column while sipping a tropical drink on a raft somewhere fabulous.

All levity aside, it is important to be aware of is how your GI tract normally functions and what typical bowel activity is for you. If you notice a prolonged change, that's when you need to closely monitor what's happening.

In addition, if you are feeling pain or other pronounced symptoms, it's time to call your doctor.

Signs of Bowel Trouble That You Should Not Ignore:

- **Blood in your stool:** If you see even a small amount of blood in your feces on a recurring basis, see a doctor.
- **Color change:** Bowel movements are generally brown in color because of bile, which is produced in the liver. If the stool is black, it can be a sign of internal bleeding. Stool color also changes depending on the kind of foods you eat. (Before you panic, did you eat a beet salad at that trendy restaurant?)
- **Change in stool consistency:** Everyone has bouts of diarrhea from time to time. But if you are used to having solid bowel movements and now have diarrhea frequently, it could be a sign of something more serious-especially if you also have abdominal pain, bleeding, and weight loss.
- **Constipation:** This typically can be due to lack of proper hydration or side effects from a medication. If your symptoms don't improve in a few days after an increase in fluids, see your doctor.

If you have any questions or if you are exhibiting some of the signs that I have outlined above you, please contact your primary care provider. Another great resource for you to consider is stoolanalyzer.com.

What a shame this topic gets such a bum rap, glad we got to the bottom of it.

This column was published in [Lovin' Life After 50](#) and [Jewish News](#) as Cypress' monthly contribution.