

TCM: healthy movements

Bowel movements should be checked daily. Their appearance can tell you if your body is balanced and can warn of potential diseases.

What constitutes a regular bowel movement is different for everyone and can range from three times a week to three times a day.

The stool should be neither too hard nor too soft, and should not contain blood, mucous or undigested food.

If you notice a persistent change in your bowel movements, especially blood in your stool, abdominal pain or weight loss, you must undergo a medical examination to identify the underlying problem.

An efficient digestive system promotes physical and emotional well-being. During a TCM consultation, the physician will always ask about the frequency and consistency of your stool and the accompanying sensations during defecation.

Infrequent defecation or difficulty having bowel movements may be associated with hard and dry stools. When people with this problem also have bad breath, a yellowish tongue, and low urine output, it indicates the presence of heat in the body. Physicians select Chinese rhubarb, immature bitter orange or magnolia bark to purge the excessive heat.

Constipation, nausea, and feelings of distension, belching and loud intestinal sounds can be treated with costus root and betel nut to smooth the flow of *chi* in the intestines.

Some people have to strain forcefully to release the stool even though it has a normal consistency. They also look pale and tend to sweat and become fatigued easily.

Physicians use astragalus root and ginseng to replenish *chi* and activate intestinal movements.

Elderly people may suffer from an internal coldness that leads to a dull pain in the abdomen, cold limbs, and a pale complexion.

Physicians would use cistanche and cassia bark to warm and lubricate the intestines.

Women who have just given birth or recovered from a major illness may pass hard, lumpy stools, which indicates a serious exhaustion of blood and body fluids. Figwort root, dwarf lily-turf tuber and rehmannia root can lubricate the intestines and soften the stool.

Loose stools or frequent defecation indicates a weakened

digestive system. Some people have the urge to go to the toilet immediately after meals.

They also may experience dull pain and distension in the abdomen, loud intestinal sounds, fatigue and a poor appetite. Physicians prescribe costus and amomum with Six Noble Ingredients Pill (*xiang sha liu jun zi wan*) to reactivate spleen and stomach functions.

Hot and humid weather can result in loose stools accompanied by a burning sensation in the anus, so TCM suggests using mosla herb, poria and water-plantain rhizome to expel the accumulated dampness and heat.

A stressful life can trigger an overactive intestine. This is due to a hyperactive liver restricting the normal functioning of the spleen. Largehead atractylodes rhizome and ledebouriella root help to harmonise the relationship between these two organs.

Improper food intake may lead to diarrhoea with partly digested food and a bad odour. However, diarrhoea with undigested food and a fishy odour can also appear in a weakened kidney system. Diarrhoea early in the morning is a typical sign of this. Psoralea and medicinal evodia fruits are used to invigorate the kidney.

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