

TO POOP OR NOT TO POOP, THAT SHOULD NEVER BE THE QUESTION?

Poop, it's not something we typically chat about with our friends and family, and that really stinks! Because poop may be one of the most important things we do all day. So let's talk about why it's your duty to understand doody.

There is one long tube that starts at your mouth and ends at your anus – it's called your GI Tract and is nearly 30 feet long – that's as high as a two-story building! Every thing that you put into your mouth, everything placed in a person's feeding tube is mixed with additional juices the body makes to help with digestion and everything eventually comes out as poop or pee. But there's a lot of other stuff going on in there.

Did you know that the chemicals or neurotransmitters responsible for happy moods (serotonin) is largely made right in the same place that your food is being changed into energy for your body as well as the waste that makes poop?

Why is this important? How grumpy do you feel when you can't poop? How about someone in your family? Over time, it may be that this inability to poop makes you feel super awful. Now imagine that you can't express this feeling with words. Maybe instead you start to act agitated or angry or maybe you withdraw, get quiet - you might even stop eating, or get a headache or a fever. Your mood is different and your body feels terrible. This isn't just because the tummy starts to swell, cramp, and start crowding your stomach and lungs. You know that "gut feeling" you have? That's a real thing, that's why your gut is often called your second nervous system and one of the many reasons it is important to keep it running right.

Did you know that it is a normal part of the process of digestion for bacteria to grow and die while breaking down food? This is in part why people 'pass gas.' Bacteria in your body are normal, but it's important to know that there are good bacteria and bad bacteria. The good is awesome, and keeps the gut healthy. The bad bacteria are not. They can cause diarrhea, constipation, and really smelly gas that can make you want to *pass out!* But sometimes people don't pass this gas because the stool is hard, creating a roadblock. We call this roadblock constipation. This is even worse than the stench, because this stool is creating a problem that is not only smelly but also dangerous and you must pay attention to it, even if you'd rather not think about it.

Constipation is much easier for people with an intellectual disability to encounter because some naturally have lifestyles that do not promote normal pooping. Medicines, a lack of fiber such as found in salad and fruit, and a lack of activity, all slow the movement of the bowel. In order to make sure that the bowels keep moving regularly, there must be adequate fluids to make sure the poop is soft enough to come out. Sometimes, there also needs to be fiber supplements added, and even stool softeners, laxatives or enemas.

One of the most important things you can do if you care about those in your care is make sure that they poop on a regular schedule...but not too much!

The average adult male poops about 2 pounds/day, which seems like a lot, but remember you've got 30 feet of pipeline. (Fortunately we are not pandas; they poop 48 pounds of stool/day).

Stools should be soft, long, but not liquid or watery- more like peanut butter or toothpaste. Watery liquid on the other hand might be diarrhea- and you definitely want to wash that hand with soap and water.

Diarrhea can cause too much fluid loss and also a loss of important electrolytes like salt and potassium. But sometimes, if the tummy is getting big, it could also be due to a different kind of constipation called impaction, and this is very dangerous. A medical professional really should evaluate both of these situations. So remember this, **“if in doubt, send them out”** – and make sure that someone who can give you the scoop on the poop checks them over.

There’s a joke that says, “Why are people with constipation so rude?”... “Because they don’t give a crap.” People with an intellectual disability may not even be able to be rude. This is why it’s important that all care givers “give a crap”, and make sure that they are pooping pretty much every day.