

Understanding gastrointestinal health

The gastrointestinal system, also referred to as the gastrointestinal tracts, digestive system, digestive tract or gut, is a group of organs that includes the:

- Mouth
- Esophagus
- Stomach
- Pancreas
- Liver
- Gallbladder
- Small intestine
- Colon (large intestine)
- Rectum

The gut serves many essential roles in sustaining and protecting the overall health and wellness of our bodies, starting with the intake and absorption of nutrients and water. The digestive process provides the building blocks the body needs to live, function and stay healthy.

There are seven types of stools, according to the Bristol Stool Chart. The type of stool depends on the time it spends in the colon. After you pass a stool, what you see in the toilet bowl is the result of your diet, fluids, medications and lifestyle. The seven types are:

1. Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
2. Sausage-shaped but lumpy
3. Like a sausage, but with cracks on the surface
4. Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
5. Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (passed easily)
6. Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, mushy stool
7. Watery, no solid pieces



Types 1 and 2 indicate constipation. Types 3 and 4 are ideal stools and are easiest to pass. Types 5 through 7 may indicate diarrhea and urgency. Being “regular” is a way of describing normal bowel function. It means that soft, yet formed, bowel movements are easily passed, and that it happens anywhere from one to three times a day to three times a week.

There are a number of ways to help your gut health:

- Lower your stress levels
- Get enough sleep
- Eat slowly
- Stay hydrated
- Take a prebiotic or probiotic
- Check for food intolerances
- Change your diet

Sources: [med.nyu.edu](https://www.med.nyu.edu)*, [menshealthresourcecenter.com](https://www.menshealthresourcecenter.com)*, [healthline.com](https://www.healthline.com)*, [health.usnews.com](https://www.health.usnews.com)*, [continence.org.au](https://www.continence.org.au)*

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