

# Healthy Bowels

## What's Normal and What's Not?

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# Today's focus

Normal healthy bowel and the three main functional gastrointestinal disorders:

- Constipation
- Stool impaction
- Faecal incontinence



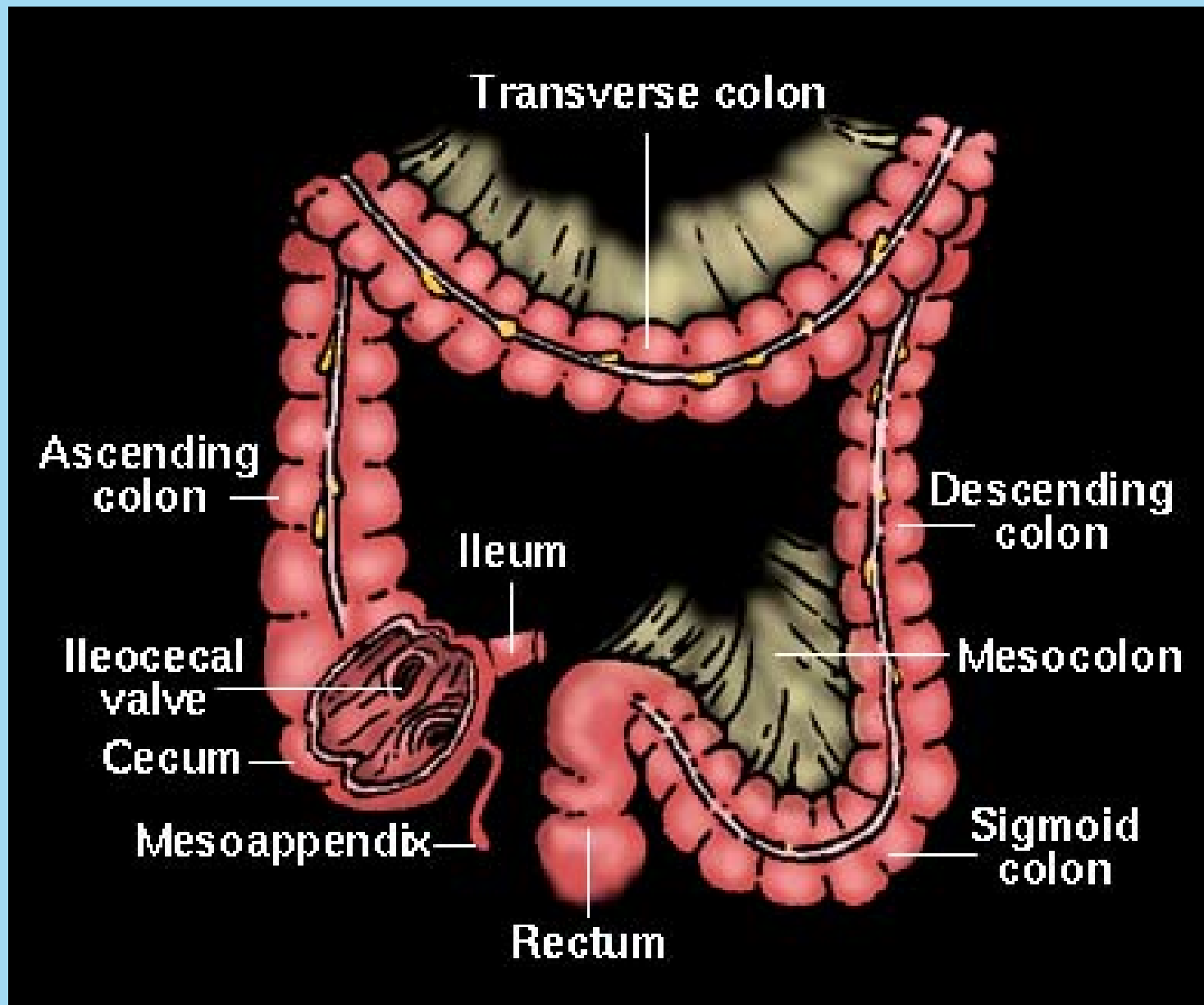
# Take action

Elimination is a normal essential function

Faeces deserves attention and consideration

Act on bowel problems now







# What's normal

Normal defecation frequency can be three times a day to three times a week

Generally accepted that there is wide variation of defecation behaviours <sup>(1)</sup>

# The Bristol Stool Form Scale



- Separate hard lumps, like nuts



- Sausage-like but lumpy



- Like a sausage but with cracks in the surface



- Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft



- Soft blobs with clear-cut edges



- Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool



- Watery, no solid pieces reference (Heaton)

# Bowel 5 main functions

1. Storage
2. Absorption
3. Secretion
4. Synthesis of some vitamins
5. Elimination (5)

# Normal bowel function?

Is dependent on:

- Normal rectal filling
- Recto anal inhibitory reflex and sampling
- Decision to defecate (brain signals)
- Relaxation of pelvic floor muscles and coordination of abdominal contraction
- Correct posture <sup>(6)</sup>



# Constipation is not normal?

If defecation is less than your usual frequency it could be constipation?

Constipation relates to:

- Frequency
- Consistency
- Level of straining
- Feeling of incomplete evacuation
- Pain
- Bloating
- Flatulence
- Diarrhoea (1)



# Rome II Criteria

Definition scale of constipation:

- Present for at least 12 weeks out of last 12 months
- Symptoms of straining and passing hard lumpy stools and incomplete evacuation for at least a quarter of the time
- Passing three or fewer bowel movements a week <sup>(5)</sup>

# Prevalence

## Constipation:

- 38% of people aged over 74 years living in the community <sup>(1)</sup>
- 81% of older people in hospital <sup>(1)</sup>
- 20% of people aged 41-50 years living in the community <sup>(1)</sup>



# Stool impaction

A complication of severe constipation:-

- The person is unable to pass faeces of his/her own accord

Symptoms of stool impaction: –

- Faecal incontinence
- Rectal discomfort
- Nausea/vomiting
- Abdominal pain and distension
- Urinary frequency
- Urinary overflow <sup>(5)</sup>



# Faecal incontinence is not normal?

## Faecal incontinence:

- Faecal (anal/bowel) incontinence, the involuntary loss of fluid and or solid stool that is a social or hygienic problem <sup>(3)</sup>
- Current ICS 2010 does not include the inability to control flatus <sup>(6)</sup>

# Prevalence

## Faecal incontinence:

- 11%–15% of the general community population <sup>(6)</sup>
- 11%-17% of the older community population <sup>(5)</sup>
- 10% of hospitalised patients <sup>(6)</sup>
- 46% of institutionalised older persons (more prevalent with cognitive decline) <sup>(1)</sup>

# Impact

- Constipation and faecal incontinence can be mild, severe, infrequent or a long term chronic problem
- People are unlikely to discuss this with a health care provider
- Significant costs occur with over the counter and prescription medications
- Significant impact on quality of life - absenteeism from workplace, decreased social contact and general well being (4)

# Prevention of bowel problems

**Prevention is much better than cure!**

- Focus on early identification strategies and recommendations
- Promote healthy bowel function
- Provide best practice information
- Encourage help seeking and support

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