How Can I Do to Make My Stools Soft?

Dietary fiber and fluids make stools soft. Eating fruits, vegetables, beans, and grains and drinking plenty of water or other fluids each day can help your body to form stools that are soft, flexible and easy to pass.

How Often Do I Have to “Go”?

Move your bowel anytime you feel the urge to “go”. Avoid withholding stools as this can cause them to dry out and harden.

Your colon will naturally produce stools. When stools are ready, a group of muscles near your rectum will “urge” you to move your bowel. The “urge” to move your bowel happens in a natural rhythm that is unique to your body. The “urge” often happens after meals, after sleep, or during play. It may happen once or twice a day, or even once every other day. It may also happen once every three days. To maintain your health, it is important to be able to move your bowel at least one time every two to three days without needing to push hard each time. Remember to wash your hands after using the bathroom.

Can I Withhold a Stool?

Yes. Just as we can hold the bladder, we can also hold the bowel. This helps us to get to the bathroom. Withholding stools a few minutes is ok, but regularly withholding stools for a long time is not healthy for your body. When you feel the urge to “go”, respond as quickly as you can. Holding your stools back can make stools become hard, dry and difficult to pass. Move your bowel as soon as you can, every time you feel the urge to “go”.

Have you ever made a sand castle or a mud pie? If so, you know that water can help bind things together. Similarly, the colon (also called the bowel) combines water and left over bits of undigested food (and other waste matter such as dead cells and bacteria) to make a stool. After a stool is formed, you feel the urge to “go” (to move your bowel).

Moving the bowel is how your body gets rid of waste. Being able to get rid of waste keeps your body healthy. If we could not move the bowel to get rid of waste, we would get sick.

The text below explains how stools are formed by the colon. Text questions are on p.2.
1. What Does a Stool Contain?
   □ Water.
   □ Tiny bits of undigested food particles.
   □ Other waste matter such as dead cells and bacteria.
   □ All of the above.

All of the above is correct. The colon uses water and other waste particles to form a stool. Because stools contain bacteria, they can spread germs. To avoid spreading germs, wash your hands after using the bathroom.

2. Why does moving your bowel help to keep you healthy?
   □ Moving my bowel is one way my body gets rid of waste.
   □ Moving my bowel helps to keep stools from becoming hard and dry.
   □ Both.

Both are correct. Moving your bowel helps you get rid of waste, helps keep you healthy, and keeps stools from becoming hard, dry and difficult to pass.

3. What are the qualities of a well formed stool?
   □ Moist, soft, flexible, and easy to pass.
   □ Tubular in shape and hold this shape.
   □ Measure about 4-7 inches in length and about 1½ inches in diameter.
   □ Colored various shades of brown and sometimes green.
   □ Bits of undigested food particles, such as corn, may be visible.
   □ All of the above.

All of the above is correct. Stools will vary in their quality depending on the foods we eat.

4. What can I eat and drink to make my stools soft, flexible and easy to pass?
   □ Fruit.
   □ Vegetables.
   □ Beans.
   □ Grains.
   □ Water or other fluids.
   □ All of the above will help make my stools soft, flexible and easy to pass.

All of the above is correct. A diet that contains both fiber and fluids help to make well formed stools that are easy to pass.

5. How often do you move your bowels to get rid of a stool and keep your body healthy?
   □ Once or twice a day.
   □ Once every two days.
   □ Once every three days.
   □ All of the above are normal and will help to keep me healthy.

All of the above is correct. The rhythm of your body is unique. Clinically, to maintain your health, you should move your bowel at least once every three days.

6. Is it ok to withhold a stool?
   □ Move your bowel every time you feel the urge to “go”.
   □ Withholding stools for a few minutes is ok while find a bathroom.
   □ Withholding stools for a little while longer is ok only if you cannot get to a bathroom. Use the restroom at your next opportunity. Do not make a habit of withholding stools.
   □ Avoid withholding stools. It makes them dry out and become hard.
   □ All of the above.

All of the above. You should move your bowel every time you feel the urge to “go”. While not recommended, you can withhold stools a short while from time to time, but not daily.