

Colon Health: Taking out the Trash of Life

Our journey through the digestive tract ends in the colon or large intestine. This is the place where the final steps of absorption and elimination of waste from the body occur. Colon health is a vital part of our overall health.

The colon consists of several different sections, the cecum and appendix, the ascending, transverse and descending colons, the sigmoid colon and the rectum. The main functions of the colon is re-absorption of water to make the stool a more solid mass and to move the stool out of the body.

Most of the vitamins and minerals, protein, fats and carbohydrates have been absorbed from the original meal when it reaches the colon. Wastes and toxins have also been added to the mass from the liver and the lymphatic system. So now our original meal has been reduced to trash that needs to be compacted and moved out of the body.

Transit time from mouth to rectum should be 12-18 hours. Less time than this indicates poor absorption and more time will allow the waste products to be reabsorbed through the colon wall. You can easily check your transit time at home by taking 5-10 grams of charcoal on an empty stomach and counting how long it takes for your stool to turn black.

One of the most amazing facts about the colon is that it is the natural home to trillions of beneficial bacteria, such as *Lactobacillus acidophilus*. We are just beginning to recognize the significance that these bacteria, called probiotics, play in health. These “good bugs” affect everything from immune function in the whole body to decreasing gut absorption of carcinogens. Without a healthy population of them in the colon, your health is at risk. You can support a healthy population of beneficial bacteria by taking a high quality probiotic supplement, eating lots of fiber and decreasing your intake of sugar.

Most common health problems of the colon are related to a lack of dietary fiber. Fiber cleans the large intestine as it passes through and binds to toxins so they can be safely eliminated in the stool. Our bodies are designed to have large amounts of daily fiber from fruits, vegetables and whole foods. Conditions such as constipation, diverticulitis, hemorrhoids, polyps and colon cancer are preventable and often treatable by increasing your daily fiber intake.

One of my favorite, simple ways to increase fiber is by adding flax seeds to the diet. Flax seeds are cheap and very effective at bulking up the stool. I recommend soaking them in water before adding them to applesauce, almond butter, or other mixable foods. When you first increase your fiber intake you might feel a little full and gassy at first. This will pass over time as the fiber helps you clean the trash out of your colon. Stick with it and you will find your way to better overall health by supporting your colon!

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” Aristotle