

The Tuesday Minute

Nutritional information.... one byte at a time

This Week's Topic

How To Open A Sluggish Bowel

Whether you know it or not, most of your patients have borderline GI problems. You may have seen another Tuesday Minute about measuring transit time, and how patients become constipated with slow transit times, but I thought it would be helpful to review the basic factors and first treatment options.

Simple things like chewing your food better and increasing fiber, water, and increasing movement can make a huge difference. And of course, replacing healthy bacteria using probiotics is critical every time antibacterial agents or extreme stress are encountered.

If the basics don't get results, try looking north to effect the south when it comes to the bowel. Sometimes the problem is "upstream" from the bowel. For example, one of the classic symptoms of hypothyroidism is constipation. A slow thyroid can mean a slow transit time.

Another possible cause is low stomach acid. Poor digestion can cause a sluggish bowel. Also remember, one of the main jobs of the liver is to clean the bowel. Therefore a sluggish liver can mean a sluggish bowel.

It's helpful to have blood tests to confirm subjective symptoms but using the health assessment questionnaire is pretty accurate on detecting hypothyroid issues, hydrochloric acid levels, and a sluggish liver. On this page you can download the patient questionnaire along with the answer

key. If a patient scores high in these areas be sure to address these "upstream" causes of slow transit time while you work to open the bowel.

It's a good practice to have every one of your patients filling out a questionnaire like this on intake and every 3 months while they are in your care to assess new information and progress. Patients forget how bad they were before they saw you and it's your job to remind them. Sometimes patients don't like to fill out questionnaires. I usually just tell them I can ask the questions individually and charge them an hourly rate or they can do it at their leisure for free. It's always amazing to me how quickly people change their mind when they understand the rules.

So let's consider ways to get the bowel rocking and rolling. The fastest way I know of to open the bowel is with liquid magnesium. Magnesium draws water to the bowel and relaxes the bowel muscles; the result is a loose stool. The product I like is Aqua Mag-Cl from Biotics Research. Each teaspoon is 200 mg of magnesium.

The average American diet only contains 40% or less of the FDA's requirement for magnesium. And really, the FDA's level is just enough to avoid a major disease so we are not even talking about optimal health levels. That being the case, most of your patients are deficient in this bowel important mineral.

Some of the other conditions that borderline magnesium deficiency can cause are: back spasms, migraines, spastic colon, eye twitches, asthma, depression, hypertension, insomnia, heart arrhythmias, Raynaud's or angina. Undiagnosed magnesium deficiencies that continue to be untreated can eventually lead to a sudden heart attack with instant death.

The world's leading expert on magnesium is Dr. Seelig. She has been studying magnesium deficiencies for over half a century; and she claims that 80 % of the population is magnesium deficient.

So when opening the bowel, let's use magnesium which we know can make a huge difference in a patient's overall health rather than herbs that force the bowel to go into spasm causing a dumping effect.

Unfortunately, Aqua Mag-Cl is not flavored and its kind-of salty. Because of that, it must be mixed with tangerine, pear, or apple juice. Don't use citrus as it makes the taste stronger. For patients that don't like the taste of the liquid, I use Mg-Zyme. It's 100 mg per tablet and can be taken on an empty stomach before bed. We usually start with 4 tablets and increase until a loose but formed stool is accomplished.

The beauty of the liquid magnesium is that it works so fast, in a few days the level can be titrated. The recommended amount is anywhere from 400 -800 mg per day. By using the bowel tolerance method, we can be sure we are getting the correct dose and regulating the bowel as well. By the way, magnesium also has a tranquilizing effect on the mind and is needed for hundreds of enzyme systems, especially those necessary for energy production.

Another low tech "folk medicine" answer for constipation is to take 1/2 of a raw white potato and slice it thinly, then salt with an organic sea salt. Eat the raw potato before bed. I'm not sure of the mechanism but one of my favorite mentors has been using it for 30 years.

Another favorite way to liberate the bowel is to use vitamin C to bowel tolerance. You can use a mineral ascorbate form of vitamin C called Mixed Ascorbates. This vitamin C cocktail can also assist in the alkalization process, increase needed mineral levels, and provide the water soluble antioxidant vitamin C. Using either the powder or tablets, vitamin C can be taken throughout the day until a loose but formed stool is achieved.

Another way to open the bowel is by using the powdered green drink from Biotics, NitroGreens. One look at the powder will tell you that the organic grasses in NitroGreens are loaded with Chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is a great healer for the GI tract. NitroGreens also has the beet juice, carrot juice, and sprouted cruciferous vegetables that assist with liver detoxification. Use enough to cause a loose but formed stool. NitroGreens is not a quick fix like the Aqua Mg-CL or vitamin C cocktail, but it is extremely healing for the bowel.

So in summary, let's do the easy things first: more water, fiber, exercise or movement, chewing food as a lifestyle, and healthy probiotics. Then let's open things up with the magnesium, vitamin C, or chlorophyll. And don't forget to check upstream for thyroid, hydrochloric acid levels, and liver issues.

Thanks for reading this week's Tuesday Minute.