

# Bowel and Symptom Journal

For Adults and Children over 3 years of age

Your stool (poop or bowel movement) is a result of your diet, fluids, lifestyle, and medicines. Your bowel movements can tell you about the health of your digestive system.

A *bowel and symptom journal* can help you find patterns that may give you clues to digestive problems. Tracking your symptoms can aid you and your healthcare team to adjust your care plan to help you feel better.

## How often should I have a bowel movement?

Normal bowel movements are different to each person. They can occur as little as once every 3 days. Or can occur up to 3 times daily. The most important thing is that your stool is soft and easy to pass. Children 3 years and older have about 1 stool each day.

## What is a normal bowel movement?

A normal stool can look different from person to person, and can vary from day to day. It can be normal to have different types of stool. It can also be normal to sometimes have a hard stool or very watery stool. Your healthcare team may have you use a tool like the *Bristol Stool Chart*.

## What should my stool look and smell like?

All shades of brown are normal. It is common to have an unpleasant smell to your stool.

The colour, smell, and texture of your stool changes often. Changes can come from foods, medications, the bacteria in your gut, and bile (a yellow-green fluid that helps digest fats). For example, eating beets may make your stool red. Or eating a high fat diet may make your stool look oily.

## What are some common symptoms?

You may have digestive symptoms with or without a bowel movement. These may include bloating, gas, lack of appetite, nausea, and pain.

## What is the Bristol Stool Chart?

There are 7 types of stool. The type of stool depends on how long the stool spends in your bowel (colon).

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

**Types 1 and 2** may mean constipation (hard to pass).

**Types 3 and 4** are the easiest to pass (soft stools).

**Types 5 to 7** may indicate diarrhea (liquid) or urgency.

Use the journal below to help you track your bowel movements, and/or any symptoms you may have. This is only an example. You and your healthcare team can work together to make a plan. Your plan may include what you write down (or track) and for how many days.

## How to use your journal:

1. Record **each bowel movement or when you have a symptom**. Record as much information as you'd like.
2. Use the *Bristol Stool Chart* on page 1 to help you describe your stool in the *Type* column.

## Bowel and symptom journal

| Date                      | Time           | Amount   | Type   | Symptoms   |
|---------------------------|----------------|--|--|--|
|                           |                | <b>Small:</b> less than ½ cup<br>(125 mL)<br><b>Medium:</b> ½–1 cup<br>(125–250 mL)<br><b>Large:</b> more than 1 cup<br>(250 mL) | <b>1-2</b> Hard to pass<br><b>3-4</b> Easy to pass<br><b>5-7</b> Diarrhea or urgency<br><br><u>Presence of Blood:</u><br>+ Smear on toilet paper<br>++ Streaks in stool<br>+++ In toilet or diaper | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little or no appetite</li> <li>• Belly or abdominal pain</li> <li>• Oily, undigested food, unusual colour</li> <li>• Unusual smell</li> <li>• Nausea, vomiting</li> <li>• Bloating, gas, feeling full</li> <li>• Heartburn, acid reflux</li> <li>• Moderate to extreme urgency</li> <li>• Incomplete clearance of bowels</li> </ul> |
| <i>Example:<br/>Jan 1</i> | <i>1:00 pm</i> | <i>Medium</i>  | <i>6++, urgent</i>   | <i>Ran to the bathroom immediately after lunch. Some belly pain. Doesn't feel like it completely emptied.</i>  |
|                           |                |  |  |  |
|                           |                |  |  |  |
|                           |                |  |  |  |
|                           |                |  |  |  |
|                           |                |  |  |  |
|                           |                |  |  |  |

These questions may help you understand what can affect your bowel movements or digestive symptoms. There is space to write your own notes.

## Bowel and symptom journal questions

| Questions   | Notes |
|---|-------|
| Describe your typical bowel habits. For example, your most common stool type, and how often you have bowel movements. |       |
| Is the journal you made on page 2 normal for you? If not, what is different?  |       |
| What changes in your bowel habits or symptoms would you like to see?  |       |
| Have you noticed any foods or drinks that make your symptoms worse?   |       |
| Have you noticed any foods or drinks that help your symptoms?   |       |

How do the factors listed below affect your bowel movements and/or symptoms?

|  |  |
|--|--|
| The amount of food you eat?  |  |
| The amount of liquid you drink?  |  |
| The timing of your meals?  |  |
| A change in the amount or quality of sleep?                                |  |
| The length, type, or level of physical activity?                           |  |
| A change in stress or emotions?  |  |
| Are there other factors that that impact your bowel movements or symptoms? |  |

Do you have questions or concerns about your journal? You may record them below and contact your healthcare team or doctor.