

Stool Gazing

Consistency	
Hard stools	Hard and difficult to pass (may be small separate pellets or lumped together).
Possible causes	Slow transit time — the stool is moving too slowly and becomes drier as fluid is absorbed. Lack of fiber results in a dry stool (fiber retains fluid). Low carbohydrate diet (proteins and fats do not contain fiber).
Cures	Increase fluids, especially water Add fiber — wheat bran (will absorb water and add bulk to the stool) Increase raw fruits and vegetables which contribute natural fluid and fiber. Alter transit time — try specialty yogurts.
Too soft	Liquid stools which move very rapidly and sometimes with great urgency.
Possible causes	Rapid transit time (little fluid being absorbed along the way). (The GI tract handles about eight liters of fluid provided for digestion and ease of transport each day. If the contents are moving too rapidly, the fluid is not absorbed). Changes in diet (increase in fiber or raw foods which contribute fluid and indigestible material to the stool). Pathogens (bacterial or viral infections can result in soft watery stools as your GI tract tries to rid the body of these harmful organisms).
Cures	Eat a diet without raw foods and visible fibers. Cook your foods and chew thoroughly so they are easier to digest. See an MD for treatment of your infection or suggestion of medications to slow transit time.
Stool Gazing Alerts	
Skinny stools	This is an alert for something that is abnormal in the colon and the only way the stool can pass is in a very thin form. It could mean polyps or a mass in the colon. See an MD for evaluation.
Floating stools	Stools are not supposed to float on water. If they do, you may well be excreting fat in your stools which means you are not digesting and absorbing it. Floating stools with fat have such a strong odor the entire house might smell. So unless you are eating foods with Olestra (an indigestible fat substitute) or taking a medication for weight loss that causes you not to absorb all the fats you eat, you should see your doctor.
Black stools	May be due to the supplements you are taking (e.g. iron). Stop the supplement for a while to see if the color changes. Or there could be bleeding in the upper intestinal tract (the esophagus) due to reflux which can damage the lining of the esophagus, or the bleeding may be in the stomach. You need to see an MD.
Green stools	If you are eating or drinking foods with green coloring or naturally green foods that can be the cause. If you are not eating green foods, but you are taking iron, the iron could be the culprit. If none of the above are true and you also have loose stools, it may be that bile excreted from the liver is not breaking down. You should see a physician.
Gray stools	May be caused by medications (e.g. anti-diarrheal medications). Or it could be a lack of bile (excreted by the liver and necessary for the digestion of fats). If you see this type of stool and are not taking an anti-diarrheal medication, see an MD.
Red stools	May be related to something you ate with red food coloring (candies or drinks) or a food that is naturally red such as red beets. If you have not eaten red foods possibly you are bleeding from hemorrhoids (internal or external) or you could have something more serious, so seek medical care.
Yellow stools	May be associated with floating stools and excess fat in the stool. It could be a sign of a serious malabsorption disorder meaning you are not digesting and absorbing your food. If this is the case, you should see your doctor. Yellow stools are normal in breast fed infants.
Source: Hattner JAT, Anderes S. Gut Insight: probiotics and prebiotics for digestive health and well-being San Francisco: Hattner Nutrition; 2009. Pp. 109-111 www.gutinsight.com	