

HEALTH

Edited by Suzanne Harrison suzanne.harrison@scmp.com

TCM

Rose Tse and Jenny Eagleton
info@shen-nong.com

Read the signs

A traditional Chinese medicine practitioner always asks about bowel habits, in the belief that movements correlate with the condition of the organs and the state of the body's health.

They may also give an early warning of disease. Healthy people are able to defecate once or twice a day without straining. The stool shouldn't be too hard or soft and shouldn't have a foul odour. There should be no pus, blood, mucus or undigested food. A TCM

practitioner usually notes the frequency, form and colour of the stool as well as the feelings during defecation.

Certain aspects of the stool indicate particular pathologies. An offensive odour shows heat accumulation; dry, dark stools mean excessive heat in the large intestine; profuse, watery stools mean damp heat in the large intestine; and pus and blood are seen in dysentery.

Small, rabbit-like pellets are caused by the exhaustion of blood or body fluids, and often occur in postnatal women and those with serious diseases. Loose bowels are usually due to poor functioning of the spleen and stomach. Alternating dry and loose stools mean disharmony between the liver

and spleen. Stools with partly digested food and bad odour are caused by improper food. Completely undigested food suggests weak kidneys.

Constipation is said to be caused by intestinal overheating, which leads to dry, hard stools, a flushed face, irritability, foul breath, mouth sores and a red tongue with a thick coating. Intestinal coldness leads to cramps in the abdomen, a pale complexion and cold limbs.

Chi problems in the intestines usually induce the urge, but with straining.

Chi stagnation also leads to depression, frequent belching and chest "fullness".

Blood deficiency is said to cause hard, lumpy stools, a sallow complexion, dry skin, dizziness and palpitations. Women may also have menstrual problems.

Acute diarrhoea can be caused by food retention and lead to sour vomit, bloating and abdominal cramps.

Damp heat disturbance usually starts with abdominal pain, then intensive and frequent loose stools that are hot, dark yellow and foul. Symptoms typically include restlessness, thirst and a

burning sensation in the anus. Chronic cases generally result from internal disharmonies. Liver hyperactivity will lead to abdominal pain and diarrhoea when triggered by emotional disturbances.

Those with spleen weakness may pass loose or soft stools that contain undigested food and which have a fishy odour.

In cases of kidney weakness, there may be abdominal pain in the early morning, followed by a loose stool that contains undigested food. There may also be some pain in the lumbar area and heightened sensitivity to cold temperatures.

Before taking any medicine, see a TCM or medical practitioner