Potty Mouth

Nurse-Know-It-All....She's baaaaack!

September 1, 2003

Potty Mouth

Dearest Nurse,
Where the hell have you been all these months? You've got some nerve leaving us in the lurch, especially when my bowels are for shit. Help me get my movements back on track, will ya?

—Irregular Joe

Dear Joe,

It is a truth universally acknowledged that nothing is so fundamentally satisfying as a good evacuation, and only an issue as irksome as irregularity would pry me from semi-seclusion. How can I lounge on my throne whilst patients clamor for my ministrations?

Before we travel the road to regularity, let's dish the dirt on Mr. Colon. This organ—all five curvaceous feet—doubles as a waste-elimination center and water-reclamation plant. Muscular contractions (we in the health biz call it peristalsis) shuttle the body's solid waste—face it, Joe, feces!—to the tube's southern terminus, the rectum, prior to discharge into the outside world. Most times, things go off (or out) without a hitch. Other times, it can be quite a strain.

Those who opine, "A stool a day keeps the doctor at bay" should know that daily defecation is hardly the norm. "Regular" can be three "events" a day or as many per week; fewer than that and you're in the constipation zone. At the other end (ahem) of the spectrum lies diarrhea. (I smell another column.) Meanwhile, what follows is Nurse's 411 for a desirable dump.

Nurse's 6 Secrets of Prodigious Pooping

Fiber The soluble and insoluble types of this plant product (you need both) give bulk and lubrication to stools in their long march to the toilet bowl. Our ancestors gobbled about 60 grams of fiber a day. We modern types get only about 13; 35 are needed. See the problem? In addition to increasing dietary fiber (see Diet, below), intake can be enhanced through psyllium-containing products such as Metamucil.

Fluids Without them, stools won't budge, so bottoms up on water, soups, milk and fruit juice

(caffeine doesn’t count). Mom was right about prune juice: It’s a fab natural laxative.

Diet Make sure you’re getting the fiber and nutrients to keep your tube humming by eating whole-grain cereals and breads, brown rice, raw or steamed veggies and lots of fruit (apples, bananas and especially raspberries—who knew?). Add wheat bran to any dish. And lay off or cut down on low-fiber food—meat and dairy, dammit!

Table Manners Don’t just eat what’s good; eat well. This means making mealtime relaxed. Stop picnicking at your desk, sandwich in hand, firing off e-mails (you know you do it). With digestion, as with anything, a good beginning makes a good end.

Exercise Physical activity relieves stress and is essential for your poop’s proper propulsion. Run, lift, stretch, do the backstroke.

Potty Pointers Heed nature’s call. Resisting the urge to purge causes fecal hardening. On the john, don’t push, don’t pinch, don’t pause, and don’t peruse (even *POZ* !). Focus on your fundament, not the funny pages. If horoscopes are what you fancy, the bottom line is that our futures are best glimpsed by reading stools like tea leaves, looking for health-related portents in what we leave bobbing behind in white porcelain bowls.

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