

## Tips for Constipation + Probiotics for Weight Loss (Episode 02 Show Notes)

### Dr. Kristen Halland – The Nutrition & Lifestyle Review [podcast]

This podcast is about to get really awkward, quickly 😊

Let's talk about constipation. It's not just for newborns or your grandparents folks! But seriously, it's really something that's undervalued in healthcare because it's one of the ways the gut gives us clues.

And you KNOW how important the gut is to our health - it houses 70-80% of our immune system AND it even has its own nervous system, much like our brain.

When I'm working in the clinic with patients who have GI or gut issues, I do ask about bowel movements.

Constipation is a condition where the stool in the intestines become dry and hard, and it's infrequent or difficult to pass stool. It's affecting about 50% of Americans right now, and more so females than males for a variety of reasons. (Gottfried, n.d.). Hopefully our poop talk today will give you the courage to address suffering so you can have normal, healthy bowel movements!

In conventional medicine, constipation is more specifically defined as having hard stools or a bowel movement fewer than three times per week. If it's a bowel movement less than once per week, it's severe constipation.

If you've ever had bowel movements with difficulty or at that low of frequency, you KNOW that this doesn't feel healthy. Regular bowel movements are the body's way of getting rid of toxins and waste from the body, so it's very important.

In functional medicine, some sources say we need to have at least one bowel movement per day (Gottfried, n.d.) and others say up to three healthy bowel movements per day (Ruscio, 2015). I typically summarize or simplify that by saying "one bowel movement for every major meal you're eating." So in case no one has ever talked to you about that - that's how many bowel movements are normal and optimal!

Consistency matters too, not just frequency. Patients love when we're talking about bowel movements and I pull out this handy little chart called the Bristol Stool Chart. It's a medical tool designed to classify stool into seven types ranging from solid and dry to liquid with different shapes and textures. A type 3 or 4 is considered the most normal or optimal (The Bristol Stool Form Scale, n.d.). I'd definitely recommend you google the Bristol Stool Chart of course from the privacy of your own home later today.

If you're listening and you've determined that your bowel habits are in fact not normal, here's why that's a problem:

- irregular bowel movements let your hormones, like estrogen, recycle through the body. You may not know that extra hormones leave the body through our feces. Estrogen overload can lead to health issues long term - such as hypothyroidism or cervical cancer (Gottfried, n.d.)
- chronic constipation zaps energy and makes you cranky
- it raises your risk for heart disease (Ruscio, 2015)
- fecal matter sitting in the GI tract for too long promotes the growth of bad bacteria and yeast, which in turn cause symptoms like bloating, food sensitivities, skin problems, hemorrhoids, anal fissures, and other bad symptoms
- and oh did I forget to mention.... it's painful and uncomfortable!

Constipation can either be a symptom or the cause of one. Sometimes it's cause is really straightforward - like when the patient needs to drink enough water or consume more fiber. And those are easy to address. Sometimes it's more complex, like when we have to find undiagnosed food intolerances or gut inflammation.

Either way, what I don't want you to do is to cover up your symptoms and put a bandaid on them by using laxatives or stool softeners. There's a time to do that - but what works just as well and can actually help solve the problem is lifestyle change.

We're spending \$800 million dollars a year right now on over the counter laxatives (Axe, n.d.). And you'll see studies such as a 2003 study in the Journal of Clinical Gastroenterology that states that long term laxative use is not a problem for the nerves, muscles, or cells of the colon and boldly states that "the risks have been overemphasized" (Wald, 2003). But then other sources such as the Mayo Clinic state that side effects of the use of stool softeners or stimulant laxatives can include nausea, diarrhea, cramping, electrolyte imbalance, and reduced absorption of nutrients or medications. They state " Take laxatives with caution. If you're dependent on laxatives to have a bowel movement, ask your doctor for suggestions on how to gradually withdraw from them and restore your colon's natural ability to contract" (Mayo Clinic, n.d.).

So here are some of the top tips for improving constipation, start with these first:

1. Supplement with probiotics. A probiotic is basically a good bacteria in the gut and it improves transit time and stool consistency. Probiotic dosing and choosing the correct strain is highly individualized, so please ask your functional medicine practitioner to get your probiotic adjusted for your current needs. One of the families of strains called Bifidobacterium is a good choice for constipation. To get more good bacteria from foods, try sauerkraut, kim chee, or coconut kefir (Gottfried, n.d.).
2. Drink enough water. Think of the intestines like a water slide - the fluids keep matter moving smoothly. According to the Institute of Medicine, adult women should drink 2.7 liters of water daily (of which 1/2 liter comes from fresh produce).
3. Manage stress. Because stress slows the colon's transit time and extra stress hormones reduce your absorption of vitamins and minerals.
4. Eat the rights food. By that I mean.... fiber which helps facilitate movement, protects the gut, helps with weight loss, and makes you feel fuller. You may need to supplement with fiber to reach the recommended 35-50 grams of fiber daily (Gottfried, n.d.) but start by eating foods like leafy green veggies, berries, freshly ground flax seed, legumes, and quinoa. Dr. Mark Hyman says that the top food you should eliminate to help constipation is DAIRY, followed by gluten (Hyman, n.d.).
5. Exercise! Remember I've mentioned in other episodes that even just walking 30 minutes, five days a week was enough activity to improve the aging process. There are yoga poses online for constipation. Just start somewhere, and please make sure you're using your body safely.

Nutritional support from vitamin d, essential fatty acids, and a quality vitamin can also help bowel function. So can other top tips like exercise, adding MCT oil or more fats in the diet, and using magnesium. These are all great suggestions and are researched! This was difficult to only start with five tips but with hydration, good nutrition, probiotics, and managing stress - you'll help the body effectively eliminate waste.

If you liked this information, please go to our website, [www.TheBalanceDoc.com/blog](http://www.TheBalanceDoc.com/blog) for more tips! I'd recommend Dr. Sara Gottfried's book, *Younger*, if you have hormonal imbalances and constipation. I'd also recommend searching online for the Bristol Stool Chart.

As I mentioned earlier, if you've tried these methods to improve constipation and aren't getting results, you may have a more complex cause and I'd recommend working with a functional or integrative medicine practitioner that may do gut or stool testing. An example is that IBS can be a cause of constipation. You should talk to your doctor about over-the-counter options when it's indicated or if any medications you're taking may be causing constipation. And, you may consider working with an integrative R.D. nutritionist who can help you eliminate constipation-causing foods from the diet and choose the right foods for a healthy bowel. Don't be afraid to speak up about it - statistics in America show that you are not alone because constipation is accounting for over 2.5 million doctor visits a year - don't let your self feel like crap (Axe, n.d.).

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Next, let's talk about one of my favorite nutritional supplements - that's probiotics.

Probiotics are one of the best-bang-for-your-buck ways to take care of the gut. And as you remember, the gut is housing most of our immune system, it has links to the brain, it's easily one of our more important systems in the body, so it's very important to take care of the gut. Probiotics can be misunderstood, though and no, we really don't get probiotics from yogurt. When it was studied in the research, the amount of probiotic in a popular yogurt brand name that begins with an A - I don't want to name any names but I think you know what I'm talking about - the amount of probiotic was found to be "not clinically significant". But we've only been on this podcast for a few minutes and I'm digressing already. When you go into the store, you've probably seen shelves and refrigerators full of probiotics and it can be challenging to know how to pick a good one. It seems like the number of CFUs or billions of probiotics that the container has then that must mean it's better, right? But that's not the whole story. Each probiotic strain is researched to treat a different condition or to support a specific health goal. For example, there are specific strains of good bacteria to balance the gut microbiome for patients who have IBS or IBD which is Irritable Bowel Disease, some are studied to perform well with recurrent sinus or respiratory problems and so forth. So, the real story is that choosing a probiotic strain to match your health goal or condition is the best use of a probiotic supplement.

More recently, we've seen studies emerging on strains of probiotics that are best utilized for weight loss. The strains called B-lactose, B-Ramnosis and L-gasseri are some of the most widely studied and best performing for weight loss. And by the way, when you name a probiotic, like when I said B-lactose, that stands for Bifidobacterium lactose and L-gasseri stands for lactobacillus. So, those are the top three that are widely studied for weight loss but what was really interesting is that the most common strain found in an over the counter probiotic was shown to promote weight gain, oh no! And that strain was lactobacillus or L-acidophilus. There's over ten thousand types of good bacteria or probiotic that are in our gut and they help us absorb nutrients and support a healthy immune system. But not all probiotics are created equal, so here are five things that I want you to look for in a good probiotic.

First, the probiotic or any product should have a triple GMP certification. The second thing I'd like you to look for is a specific combination of strains that treat your condition or health goal. The third thing is research demonstrated benefits - and I'm not talking about marketing or advertising claims - I'm talking about a company having a research and development department. Fourth, the probiotic should be gluten free and dairy free certified. Fifth and finally, a good probiotic should have a potency guarantee and an expiration date. Please check your probiotic containers to see if the quality is high enough. Probiotics are typically a very safe nutritional supplement when the quality is there, there's very little chance for interaction with medications or negative side effects, so almost all of my patients are recommended to take probiotics because, again, it's one of the best ways that you can quickly boost gut health.

Make sure to ask your physician nutritional provider or dietician to help you pick the right probiotic for your health goals.

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### **Resources for Part I on Constipation:**

Axe, J. (n.d.). Natural constipation relief remedies: foods, supplements, and practices [Blog]. Retrieved from <https://draxe.com/natural-constipation-relief-remedies/>

Gottfried, S. (n.d.) Constipated? Get your hormones moving [Blog]. Retrieved from <http://www.saragottfriedmd.com/constipated-get-your-hormones-moving/>

Hyman, M (n.d.). Simple steps for dealing with constipation [Blog]. Retrieved from <http://drhyman.com/blog/2017/01/13/simple-steps-dealing-constipation/>

Institute of Medicine (2005). Dietary reference intakes for water, potassium, sodium, chloride, and sulfate. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/10925>.

Mayo Clinic (n.d.) Over-the-counter laxatives for constipation: use with caution [Blog]. Retrieved from <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/constipation/in-depth/laxatives/art-20045906?pg=1>

Ruscio, M. (2015 Mar 11). What can cause constipation and what to do about it [Blog]. Retrieved from <https://drruscio.com/what-can-cause-constipation-and-what-to-do-about-it/>

Stienstra, K. A. (n.d.). The joy of healthy digestion [PowerPoint]. Retrieved from [http://www.themaplecenter.org/files/7513/4763/7778/The\\_Joy\\_of\\_Healthy\\_Digestion2.pdf](http://www.themaplecenter.org/files/7513/4763/7778/The_Joy_of_Healthy_Digestion2.pdf)

The Bristol Stool Form Scale (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/healthcommunication-programs/bowel-control-awareness-campaign/Documents/Bristol\\_Stool\\_Form\\_Scale\\_508.pdf](https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/healthcommunication-programs/bowel-control-awareness-campaign/Documents/Bristol_Stool_Form_Scale_508.pdf)

Wald, A. (2003). Is chronic use of stimulant laxatives harmful to the colon? *J Clin Gastroenterol*. 2003 MayJun;36(5):386-9. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12702977>

### **Resources for Part II on Weight Loss Probiotics:**

The development of probiotic treatment in obesity: a review. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23886977>

Effect of *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* CGMCC1.3724 supplementation on weight loss and maintenance in obese men and women. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24299712>

Regulation of abdominal adiposity by probiotics (*Lactobacillus gasseri* SBT2055) in adults with obese tendencies in a randomized controlled trial. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20216555>

*Lactobacillus gasseri* SBT2055 reduces postprandial and fasting serum non-esterified fatty acid levels in Japanese hypertriglycerolemic subjects. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24548293>

Effect of *Lactobacillus gasseri* SBT2055 in fermented milk on abdominal adiposity in adults in a randomised controlled trial. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23614897>

### **Associated with weight gain:**

*L. acidophilus* (more than just the study below)

Comparative meta-analysis of the effect of *Lactobacillus* species on weight gain in humans and animals. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22634320>