

The Tuesday Minute

Nutritional information.... one byte at a time

This Week's Topic

Measure “Gut Health” Through Transit Time

The theme “heal the gut” is woven into almost every lecture that pertains to chronic disease and ultimately health recovery. Here’s a strand of the theme that’s one of my favorites. There are several lab tests to assess gut health but an indirect method and one that patients can easily get involved in, is to measure transit time.

Transit time is the time it takes for the food we eat to travel from mouth to rectum. A healthy transit time should range between 12 and 24 hours. That means that whatever we eat at noon for lunch should be exiting by at least noon tomorrow.

It's not uncommon to see transit times extend as long as 7 days. If you think about it for a second, if we allow undigested food to sit in a heated environment, the process of fermentation begins and the food that we eat begins to rot and putrefy in the digestive tract. When that happens yeast begins to grow, and intestinal gas increases from the fermentation. Bloating occurs...not pleasant!

Rotting food is not the only problem caused by a slow transit time. There are many non-food related metabolic wastes that are dumped into the intestines to be removed from the body. If they stay in the intestines too long, they can be re-absorbed and cause toxic overload.

Another potential problem is that hormone by-products can sit in the colon for extended

periods and can be re-absorbed. Also, if bile acids are allowed to stay in the colon too long, they can irritate the lining of the bowel and its function. We need to make sure that fiber, metabolic wastes, hormone by-products, and bile acids are allowed to leave the body in a timely fashion.

Pioneers in the field of natural medicine have long claimed that “death begins in the colon.” Most people are shocked to learn that 70% of the immune system is located in the bowel; and the bowel produces many important B vitamins, short chain fatty acids as well as trillions of bacteria that complete digestion.

So, how can we maintain a healthy environment for our bowel? One of the best things we can do is to keep things moving by reducing transit time. The beauty of this preventative strategy is that the patient can monitor themselves, and it costs absolutely nothing.

I’ve designed a sheet that you can use with your patients to allow them to test their own transit times. You can print out the sheet from link on the web page, but here are the basics of the test.

Have the patient eat a unique marking agent that will be seen in the stool at a predicted time and see how long it takes to come out. Make sure the person is not sensitive to that substance or it will delay the transit time. The marking agent could be corn, beets, or charcoal

tablets that can be purchased from a health food store.

Here's an example of how to eat the agents and what they will see:

- Eat ¼ cup of corn mixed with scrambled eggs for breakfast—expect to see the yellow corn kernels the next day.
- Eat 2 or 3 whole red beets, cooked or in a salad with some form of protein—expect to see a deep red in the stool.
- Eat 5-10 grams of charcoal in capsules or tablets on an empty stomach. — expect to see a black stool.

Note when the agent first appears and when it last appears. 12-24 hours is the optimal transit time. If the agent comes out in less than 12 hours it means that the transit time is too short and nutrients are not being absorbed properly. We would suspect food allergies or some form of dysbiosis causing rapid expulsion. More than 24 hours indicates that the transit time is too long. If the patient has transit time problems, have them do some of the basics fixes first and then retake the test in 2 weeks and watch the progress.

What are the basics? I have a link for the basics on the transit time chart for your patients. Here are 2 thoughts to consider after the patient is well hydrated, fiber has been increased, digestion has been assessed, and exercise or movement has been evaluated. While you are looking for the cause of the slow transit time consider using magnesium to bowel tolerance. Magnesium draws water to the bowel and helps to rehydrate the tissue.

Always use magnesium at night to assure maximum absorption. It is very relaxing by nature and will help with many cases of insomnia. Use either Mg-Zyme which is a 100mg tablet of a mixed form of glycinate, gluconate, and aspartate or use the liquid Aqua Mag-Cl. One teaspoon yields 200 mg of magnesium as chloride. Aqua Mag-Cl is a real asset for stubborn hypertension cases. I suggest a juice, like tangerine juice, to hide the taste as Mag-Cl has a definite salty taste.

With either supplement, start with about 400 mg and continue to increase until the patient has a loose but formed stool. Most people in this country are low in magnesium so replenishing this essential mineral will not only help their bowels but benefit their heart.

Finally, we want to make sure that healthy bacteria are present to assure proper bowel function. I like the BioDoph-7 Plus for several reasons. It packs a pretty good punch with 20 billion bacteria per capsule. Secondly, it contains live strains of 7 probiotics, as well as, a good dose of prebiotics. Prebiotics like inulin, arabinogalactans, and marshmallow root provide food for the bacteria as they reproduce and help create healthy mucus which is where most of the healthy bacteria make their homes.

In closing, the basics of transit time helps to measure gut health and keeps us on track with our ongoing theme..."heal the gut".

Thanks for reading. I'll see you next Tuesday.