

MS Dysfunction of the Bowel



The Unspeakable Bits; From A Life With MS

Rounding out our discussion of the “plumbing issues” that can be brought on by MS (we spoke of [Sex](#) in February), we now move on to something that many of us fear to even think about: MS-related bowel symptoms. The very idea that something might go wrong with our excretory system - a very private matter for most people - is so far beyond polite conversation that we might not even discuss it with our medical team.

Truly, MS bowel dysfunction is one of the “Unspeakable Bits”!

While symptoms of the bowel are not all that uncommon, severity beyond management is rather rare in MS.

Not unlike MS symptoms of the bladder, bowel symptoms come - mostly - in two opposite forms: constipation and loss of control. Couple these with the always-possible loss of sensation and we might not even know we have to go, or feel the discomfort of constipation.

As I said, severity of the symptoms is usually relatively mild and in many cases, the symptoms predate diagnosis and have never been thought of by us as related to MS at all.

Relatively simple (and healthy for the general population) bowel management strategies can be implemented by you and your MS medical team (if symptoms are intense enough, this may include a gastroenterologist). Steps like drinking enough water to stay properly hydrated, eating enough fiber in our diet and taking note of changes in regularity can be more helpful – particularly early on – and have fewer side-effects than prescription medications used to regulate bowel function.

A lot people with MS cut back on fluids in order to manage bladder issues, and that cutting back can get in the way of bowel function. So the strategies to manage the bladder and bowel actually need to be coordinated.

One factor often overlooked that can both cause and exacerbate bowel issues is the result of another MS symptom: lack of mobility.

The simple act of moving around helps our digestive system work properly. If a person's mobility is affected by symptoms of MS, it stands to reason that sitting in a chair or scooter for most of the day will have detrimental consequences to bowel health and function. A few, low-intensity stretches each morning can help wake mind, body **and** bowel.

Shakespeare, in a monologue from "As You Like It," writes that "All the world's a stage..." and by the seventh and final age we have returned to childhood once again. While we don't think about it much, we somehow expect that adult diapers may play a part in our final act. We have a hard time, however, thinking that we may require this prop while still "seeking the bubble of reputation."

It is important, therefore, that we not risk our health for the sake of humility. Many bowel symptoms of MS can be easily attended to well before they become severe. Not talking to our docs about our concerns early (before they happen, even) and hiding behind the bathroom door seems rather childish and, let's face it, MS makes us wise beyond our years.

Wishing you and your family the best of health.

Cheers
Trevis

Editor's Note: For additional information and resources – including referrals to medical professional in your area – call an MS Navigator at 1-800-344-4867.

Additional information related to bowel issues and MS:

Webpage: [Bowel Dysfunction](#)

Brochure: [Bowel Problems](#)