

How to stop your vacation going down the drain: Why people get constipation on holiday and what you can do to prevent it

Going on holiday is one of the highlights of the year, but for some, the annual vacation brings with it an uncomfortable side effect - constipation.

As soon as they step off the plane, many men and women who have regular bowel movements at home find they go for days without any activity, leaving them feeling bloated and uncomfortable.

So why do some people have such problems with going to the loo on holiday? MailOnline spoke to gastroenterologist Dr Robynne Chutkan to find out more...

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For many, vacations lead to constipation, causing bloating and pain (picture posed by model)

Why do some people have problems with constipation when they go on holiday?

In our bodies, we have something called an enteric nervous system, which is the nervous system that governs the gut. It's very well developed and is connected to the brain.

The same neurotransmitters in the central nervous system are present in the enteric system, so they are connected to the brain transmitters, meaning when your mind thinks something, it has a direct affect on your gut.

An example of this is when you get with stage fright and you get butterflies in the gut - that is a very real feeling, something is happening in your gut as a result of your fear.

But the the gut is also a creature of habit and it thrives on predictability. So if you are crossing time zones, your usual bowel movements are interrupted.

It starts when people wake up early for a flight, then their time zones are off and the access to their regular food is not there.



Some 'champion poopers' can go to the toilet anywhere, but others are more shy about their bathroom habits (picture posed by model)

When all kinds of things about your routine are thrown off it makes your enteric nervous system weary, so what often happens is it stops having bowel movements.

On top of this, people are often more dehydrated because they don't guzzle water on the plane or when out sightseeing because the bathrooms they have access to are less comfortable.

What can people do to try and prevent this happening?

Trying to reproduce your schedule is helpful, so if you are used to taking time with bowel movements, try to arrange your travel so you have time to do that by making travel plans later in the day.

On vacation, get into the habit of sitting on the toilet at the same time as you do at home - try and maintain the old time schedule for the transition period at least.

Try and heed the call. If you're out touring the Sistine chapel and you get the urge to go, ignoring that is really problematic, because you are training your bowel to hold it rather than let it go.

What happens is, when you then want to go later on, your gut says: 'When I told you, you said no, so now I'm going to hold on to it.'



Aeroplane cabins are very dry, which can lead to people feeling more dehydrated than usual (picture posed by models)

The gut is like a sensitive person, its feelings can get hurt, it has the attitude of 'you're not paying me attention, so I won't pay you attention'.

Another area where you can really help with constipation is by staying hydrated.

Aeroplane cabins are very dry, as are hotel rooms, so loss of fluid often happens a lot more, meaning you need a lot more water than usual to stay hydrated.

I think it's very helpful to measure your water and make sure you're getting an additional litre of water than what you normally have.

Why are some people more affected by constipation than others when travelling?

People who are more prone to constipation are more likely to be disrupted by travelling. The champion poopers tend to not be put off as much.

Some people can have a bowel movement anywhere, even in a cubicle where there is no door, while others can only go when everyone is out of the house and the dog is downstairs.



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Many men and women have issues with using public bathrooms (picture posed by model)

If you're more constipated to begin with, like if your colon is very twisty and turny, you're probably going to have a more difficult time, so you should prepare for this.

If you're in the habit of taking a fibre supplement, maybe double the dose before the trip and take it with you.

You might also need to use a cathartic like magnesium to get things going again, because if you go away for nine days and don't go once it can really ruin a trip.

How long should someone wait after last opening their bowels before getting concerned?

It all depends on what your baseline is.

If you're the type of person who goes every day, then if you skip a day, that's unusual. Whereas, If you go every three days, then six days would be the moment to sit up and take notice.



Drinking extra water will help keep the body hydrated and therefore regulated (picture posed by model)

Doubling your baseline should indicate that it might be time to initiate the back up plan (no pun intended).

People often also underestimate the benefit of exercise for stimulating a bowel movement. So getting out for a brisk walk with a water bottle can really help.

That's a great way to kill a couple of birds, you can sight-see, get some exercise and get a bowel movement going.

Or just doing some twisting yoga poses or a gentle abdominal self-massage in your hotel room can also help.

Dr Robynne Chutkan's new book [The Microbiome Solution](#) is available for £14.99 on Amazon.

Dr. Robynne Chutkan appears on Dr. Oz to talk bloating

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