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Bowel transit time

Bowel transit time refers to how long it takes for food to move from the mouth to the end of the intestine (anus).

This article talks about the medical test used to determine bowel transit time using a radiopaque marker testing.

How the Test is Performed

You will be asked to swallow multiple radiopaque markers (that show up on x-ray) in a capsule, bead, or ring.

The movement of the marker in the digestive tract will be tracked using x-ray, done at set times over several days.

The number and location of markers are noted.

How to Prepare for the Test

You may not need to prepare for this test. However, your health care provider may recommend you follow a high-fiber diet. You will likely be asked to avoid laxatives, enemas, and other medicines that change the way your bowels function.

How the Test will Feel

You will not feel the capsule move through your digestive system.

Why the Test is Performed

The test helps determine bowel function. You may need this test done to evaluate the cause of constipation or other problems involving difficulty passing stool.

Normal Results

The bowel transit time varies, even in the same person.

- The average transit time through the colon in someone who is not constipated is 30 to 40 hours.
- Up to a maximum of 72 hours is still considered normal, although transit time in women may reach up to around 100 hours.

What Abnormal Results Mean

If more than 20% of the marker is present in the colon after 5 days, you may have slowed bowel function. The report will note in what area the markers appear to collect.

Risks

There are no risks.

Considerations

The bowel transit time test is rarely done these days. Instead, bowel transit is often measured with a wireless motility capsule or colonic transit scintigraphy. Ask your provider what testing, if any, is best for you.

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