

# Gut Instincts: Navigating Bowel Changes in Menopause



Nicole Schmitt - Pelvic Health Physiotherapist

Elle Physiotherapy and Pelvic Health



Hi, my name is Nicole

---

# Goals for today:

- Do a “skim the surface” intro to understanding the digestive system
- Describe the GI changes that many of you will experience during the menopause transition
- Offer some easy tips to help keep this amazing and important system working well.

# Just a note up front...

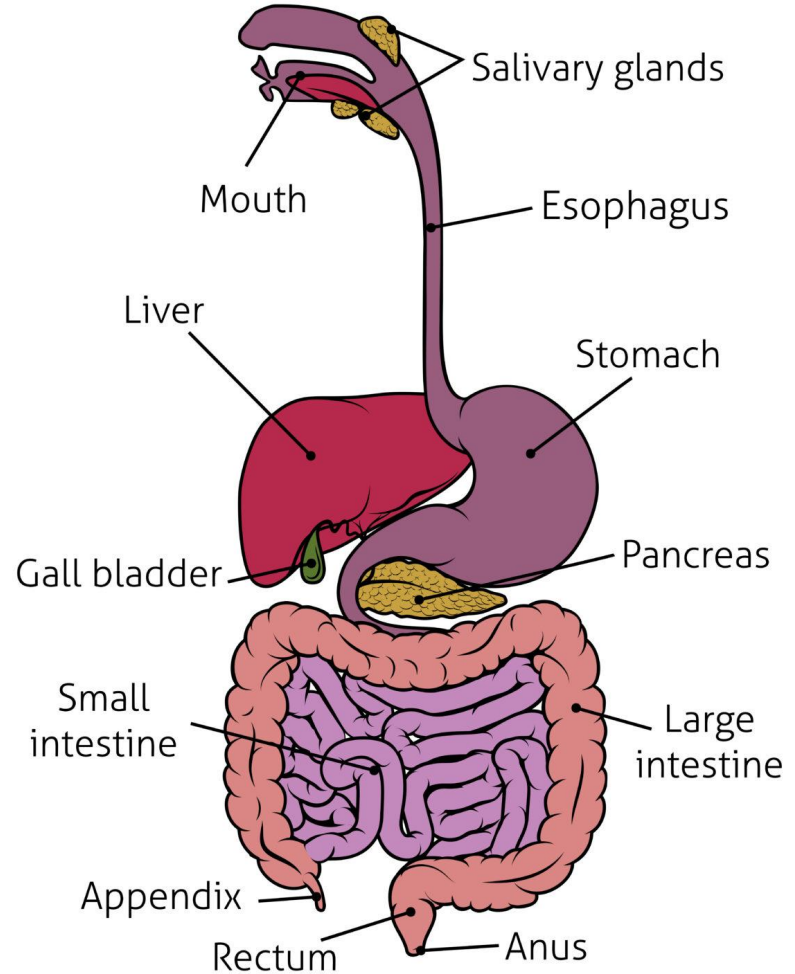
There's no shame in getting care for poop stuff.

I know it hits different than other pelvic health concerns, but lots can be done to help support this really important function of your body.

# GI (gastrointestinal) 101

# Your GI system

A quick review...



# Important Fun Facts about your GI function

- Healthy digestion starts in your mouth (chew chew chew)
- The small intestine is where the bulk of the things are absorbed into the body
- ALL stool that begins in the large intestine is liquid
- The main role of the large intestine is to take water/liquid out of the stool to give it form
- Motility describes the speed at which food moves through the GI tract
- The brain and nervous system are major players in motility. They communicate via a BIDIRECTIONAL relationship with the gut nervous system (enteric)
- The pelvic floor is the key muscle that determines if stool is let go, or kept in
- There is soooo much more I could say, but I only have 15 minutes

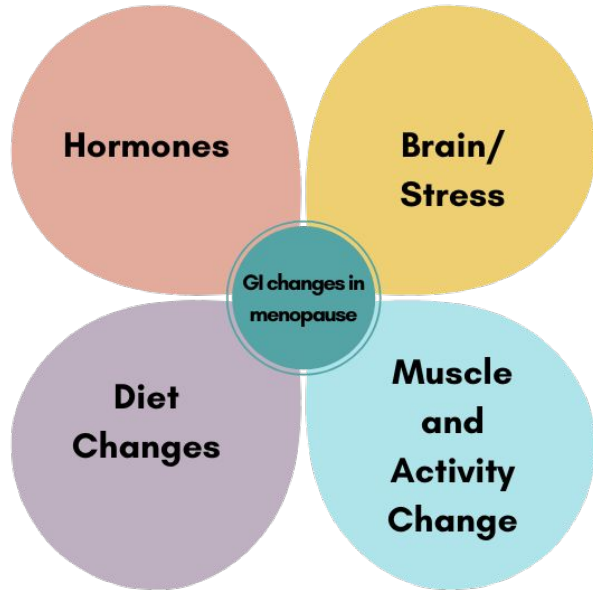
# Menopause and the GI system

This changes too... bless

1. 94% of women will experience GI symptoms during the menopause transition
  2. Most commonly bloating, constipation and abdominal pain/discomfort
  3. 82% of these reported new or worsening symptoms during menopause
-



# But why?



**Hormone changes**- Estrogen and progesterone receptors are found throughout the digestive tract that impact motility, sensitivity and the gut microbiome.

**Stress** impacts digestive function. The menopausal transition is a time where there's lots.

<https://journals.physiology.org/doi/full/10.1152/ajpgi.00144.2019>

Role of estrogen and stress on the brain-gut axis

# But why?

## Diet changes

There are a plethora of reasons why women change their diets through this season; weight loss, attempting to get more protein, fatigue, because their friends are trying something new, because we have instagram...

Often these changes, (sometimes adding in lots of on food group, or omitting another) ends up pushing out FIBRE.

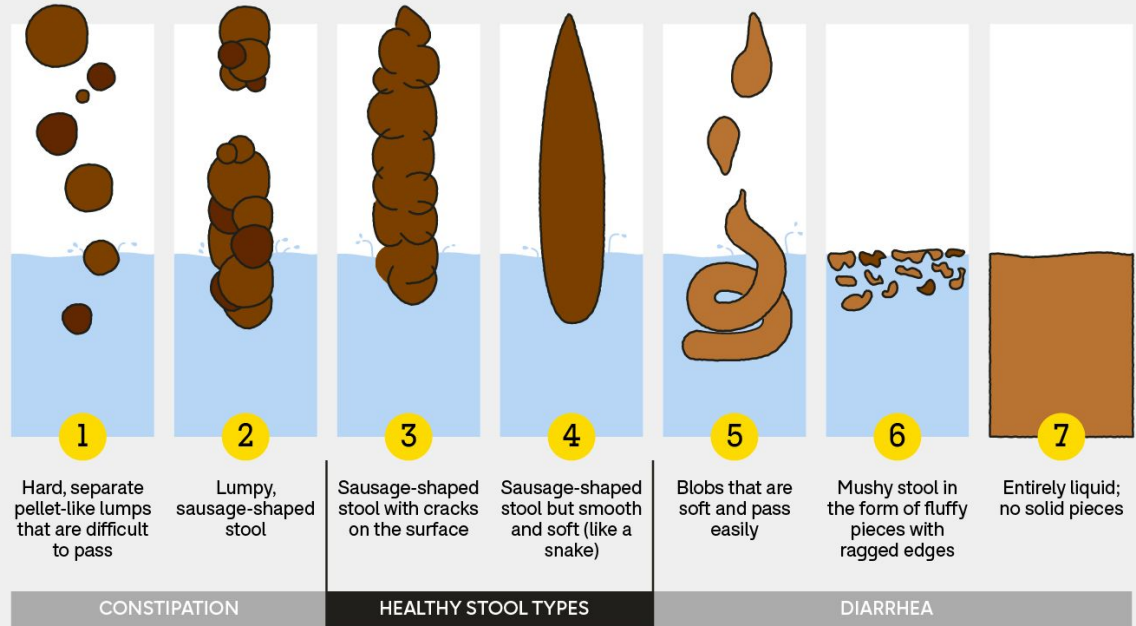


# But why?

## Movement or Muscle changes

We know muscle mass goes down in menopause, and often so does our movement. Movement supports healthy motility and PF function. Which ultimately changes our STOOL FORM.

## Bristol Stool Chart



Average transit time is 28-29 hours, but can be from 24-72.

# Now what?

3 important takeaways

# 3 Key Takeaways

Poop needs to be in your large intestine for the “just right” amount of time. To help make this happen:

- Fibre is fabulous (aim for a minimum of 25 grams/day)
- Movement is Motility
- Water is wonderful

1

Consider your brain state when you eat:

- Remember the parasympathetic nervous system controls digestion (rest and DIGEST).
- Slow down
- Chew, chew, chew
- Manage stress... the state of your nervous system will impact messaging and motility.

2

Visit your friendly neighborhood Pelvic Health Therapist

- Understand potential contributors to your digestion coming from your body/muscles
- Learn important poop habits... cliffhanger, there are lots.
- If you have IBS, chronic constipation or dyspepsia, we have a team for that.

3



## Quick Self-Screen

- ☐ I often have hard lumpy stools that are difficult to pass.
- ☐ I have to strain to void.
- ☐ I often am running to the bathroom with intense fecal urgency.
- ☐ I avoid going out because I'm concerned about accidents.
- ☐ I have difficulty controlling gas or stool.
- ☐ I often feel bloating or pain after eating.
- ☐ My BMs are either very soft or very hard. No happy medium here.
- ☐ I have struggled with hemorrhoids forever.
- ☐ When I poop, I often feel like I have emptied all the way.
- ☐ Eating stresses me out as it often gives rise to symptoms.

## Participant Resources Package

GI Resource Package  
[ellepelvichealth.com](http://ellepelvichealth.com)



**Thank you!**



# Reach out:

Find me at:

**IG:** @ellephysiopelvichealth

**Website:** [ellepelvichealth.com](http://ellepelvichealth.com)

**Email:** [nicolepelvicpt@gmail.com](mailto:nicolepelvicpt@gmail.com)

---