

# What's going on in your gut when you poop?

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.**

Shit happens, except when it doesn't. And when it doesn't, we get worried. Over the centuries, constipation has gone by many delicate euphemisms, but the problem itself refuses to budge.

To get a sense of what it means for constipation to be cultural, look no further than current estimations of the prevalence of constipation in the public. There are an awful lot of people who feel like they are constipated even though their doctors disagree. The rate of constipation in North America could be anywhere from 2 percent to 27 percent, according to [a systematic review of the literature published in 2004](#). But the studies with the highest estimates tend to collect the data from patients' self-reports, said Dr. Peter Higgins, associate professor of internal medicine at the University of Michigan and an author of that review paper. "If you look at physician discharge billing codes, it's more like 1.2 percent to 4 percent," he told me.

Unlike constipation, poop is purely biological. What you eat reaches your colon in a couple of hours but can take up to a week to make it out the other end. In the meantime, your colon is absorbing liquid, sucking up whatever nutrients it can as it uses muscle contractions to push along the stuff it can't use.

That stuff [is made up almost entirely of water](#) — 75 percent. Of the rest, most is bacteria, dead and alive, plus indigestible fiber and other parts of food your body couldn't break down during digestion. You will poop whether you eat or not, Higgins told me.

**Read full, original post:** [Everybody Is Constipated, Nobody Is Constipated](#)