

SQUATTING

POOING + PEEING THE WAY WE WERE MEANT

Children instinctively squat to poo, as do the majority of the world's population and when we go camping and are away from the sitdown toilet, we naturally squat to poo, too. But not if we can help it. And yet it would do us the world of good if we did join with the billions who do.

The sitdown toilet only came into more general use in the mid-19th century, thanks it would seem to Thomas Turiferd who gave Queen Victoria her first ceramic toilet in 1859, on the presumption the 'porcelain throne' was more dignified and would elevate the aristocracy above their 'native subjects' in the colonies. (However, it is thought the Romans may have used the sitting position on their toilets – although that is subject to conjecture because it's quite straightforward to squat on them.)

Physiologically it makes perfect sense. When we stand the bend between the rectum and the anus helps keep feces inside us. The more we bend towards a squat, the less that bend obscures the release of feces from the anus and the harder the anal sphincter has to work to keep those feces inside us. In fact, when we're standing that bend – called the anorectal angle – is about a 90° angle. A Japanese study¹ in 2010 on the Influence of Body Position on Defecation in Humans, taken together with earlier findings, suggests that the greater the hip flexion achieved by squatting, the straighter the recto-anal canal will be, and accordingly, less strain will be required for defecation. That angle also benefits



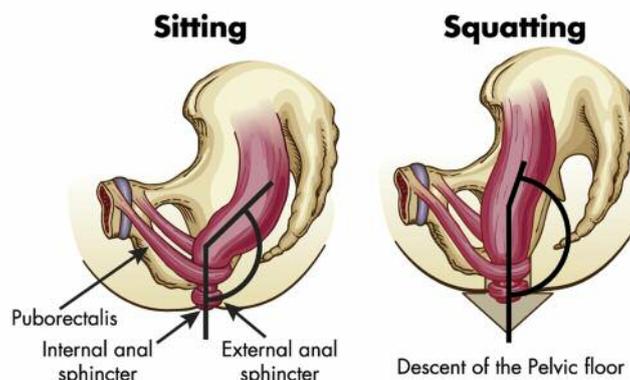
urination. Also, in the squat position, the large intestine aligns correctly; the thighs support the abdomen, and help prevent hernias and massage the intestine into action. By contrast, the muscular contractions that push food along the digestive tract are hindered by the sitting position – yet are helped by squatting. Another plus is that the squat position eliminates the need for excessive straining, thus alleviating haemorrhoids. And

generally squatting means less cleaning up and thus less toilet paper.

Some small studies suggest squatting can mean a quicker poop that feels less like an effort than pooping while sitting. A 2003 Israeli study² by Dr Dov Sikirov found it took squatters an average of 51 seconds for a bowel movement while 'sitters' took an average of 130 seconds.

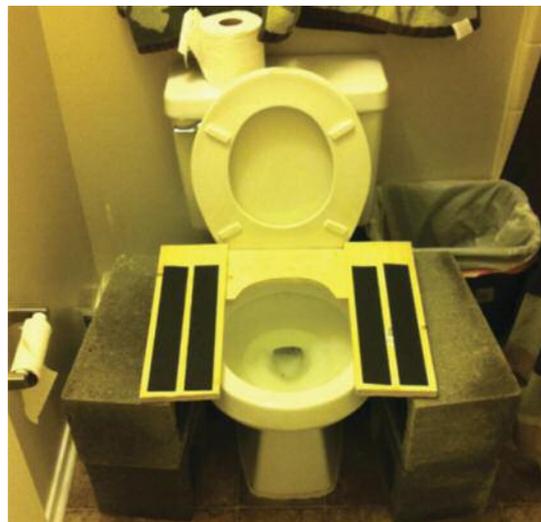
Some claim that sitting may contribute to hemorrhoids, hernias and diverticulitis. Hemorrhoids may be caused by straining during bowel movements. When you need to push harder to defecate because there is more resistance, veins in the anus swell. With hemorrhoids, those veins can stay swollen.

Hemorrhoids are less prevalent in countries where squatting is more common. In fact in a small study, more than half of hemorrhoid sufferers improved when they began squatting when pooping. Some claim squatting may reduce the incidence of colon cancer. One of the key causes is higher intra-abdominal pressures,



Anorectal angle, showing the difference between the sitting and squatting positions

and straining from bowel movements is thought to be one cause of hiatal hernias. Similarly, diverticulitis can be caused when naturally weak sections of the colon give way in response to high pressure. As a related added benefit, some claim that stored urine is also more thoroughly emptied when women squat to urinate. And that men could also benefit from squatting when peeing.



These studies and claims are preliminary and more work is needed.

Squatting is not always easy to do straight away – unless you’ve grown up with it – so be patient and give yourself a few weeks to get used to it. The muscles we use to defecate are exercised by getting down into, and up out of, the squat position. Not only will your balance improve, you’ll also give your spine a beneficial stretch.



DIFFERENT OPTIONS

TOP LEFT Squatting on toilet seat

TOP RIGHT A DIY combo of besser blocks and two feet platforms

BOTTOM LEFT Specially-designed standalone toilet squatter

BOTTOM RIGHT Flush squat toilet

HOW TO DO IT

Begin as usual, pants down below the knees, then

- Stand with each leg either side of the toilet bowl, close to the front.
- Bring one leg up to rest on the seat, and move into the squat position, placing your whole foot on the seat – your toes can hang over the edge if you like. Steady yourself with the opposite hand by resting against the wall if close enough or holding onto a toilet roll dispenser, window sill or a bathroom basin unit. (There should be something close by; if

not, put some structure there. In time, you may be able to do it unaided.)

- Then bring the other leg up, placing the foot on the seat, whilst steadying with hand.
- You’re now in the full squat position and ready to go!
- To get down, simply reverse the procedure.

In my experience, squatting beats sitting on all counts: faster poos, easier urinating, less cleanup in general. And in the case of pooing, to complete the job, why not try using a little water to do the final cleanup. I use a squirt pump bottle, which can replace toilet paper altogether if you wish. It is, in the end, cleaner than simply using toilet paper.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1757-5672.2009.00057.x/abstract>

2 springerlink.com/content/rlu7151837n07562/

■ quora.com/Human-Physiology/Is-squatting-actually-a-better-way-for-us-to-defecate

■ toilet-related-ailments.com/constipation-and-toilets.html

■ toilet-related-ailments.com/experience-with-squatting.html