

Getting Rid of Solid Waste

Any material that has not been absorbed by your small intestine continues down into your large intestine, or colon (KOLE-un). In your large intestine, large quantities of water and some remaining vitamins are absorbed into your blood. The remaining unabsorbed material forms a solid waste as it travels through the large intestine, a process that can take 18–24 hours. This solid waste is stored in the rectum (REK-tum) before being pushed out through the anus (AY-nus). What is this solid waste made of? It contains bacteria, substances that your body can't digest, and some remaining water. Bacteria live and grow in your intestines, and they help you in several ways. They break down some plant material that your body can't break down on its own, they make vitamin K, and they help prevent harmful bacteria from finding a home. The trade-off for providing a home for these helpful bacteria is the gas and odors they produce.

STOPPING TO THINK 4

The reading describes three components of human solid waste. Which two of these do you think are the main components?

ANALYSIS

1. What are some of the functions of the digestive system?
2. Copy the table below. Then fill in the table by placing an "X" to indicate the function(s) of each organ. The first row has been done for you.

Functions of Digestive Organs				
Organ (or structure)	Mechanical breakdown	Chemical breakdown	Nutrient absorption	Water absorption and solid waste production
Mouth	X	X		
Stomach				
Small intestine				
Pancreas				
Liver				
Large intestine				