Off-Color Tinkles and Sprinkles?

Changes in your urine's hue and odor can reflect something you've eaten, drugs you've been prescribed, or a medical condition that needs a doc's attention. When should color changes concern you and when can you relax? Read on!

April 8, 2011 By Willette Francis

During the day, people make numerous trips to the bathroom. But how often do we notice our urine's color and odor, unless striking changes occur? Typically, this bodily fluid's color ranges from pale yellow to deep amber, depending on the concentration of waste products in the excess water that the kidneys filter from the blood.

When changes in urine odor and color result from foods, vitamins and certain medications, these differences are usually harmless and temporary. Other times, urine changes can signal a medical issue, such as urinary tract infection or kidney or bladder cancer. Below, RH examines reasons why these unusual incidents occur and what may cause the variations.

Seeing red or pink?

Yikes! This alarming hue in your urine doesn't necessarily mean there's been a blood discharge. The culprit may be what you've been eating—for example, beets, blackberries or rhubarb can turn urine this scary shade. But only about 10 to 14 percent of people who consume beets experience a change in urine color (known as beeturia), and even among them, the coloration might occur only on occasion. Why? Because what and when you eat affect stomach acidity levels, and those, in turn, help determine your urine's color.

But eating certain foods isn't the only reason you may see red. Some laxatives and antipsychotic drugs, such as Thorazine (chlorpromazine) and Melleril (thioridazine), as well as the anesthesia-inducing or -maintaining med Diprivan (propofol), can also cause this urine color change. In addition, other red urine producers include toxins such as lead or mercury poisoning.

It is true, though, that red-tinted urine may also mean there's blood present. The condition is known as hematuria. But usually the bleeding that colors the urine isn't severe or accompanied by symptoms.

The medical problems associated with bloody urine (translation: pinkish, red or cola colored) include urinary tract infections (UTIs), an enlarged prostate, kidney or bladder stones, kidney

disease and kidney or bladder cancer. (The latter are less common reasons for bloody urine, so it's key to seek medical advice if you see red in your toilet bowl after peeing.) Strenuous activity such as running may also lead to bloody urine.

Orange-colored urine?

Most often, carrots, carrot juice and vitamin C are the culprits. Blame the carotene in orange-pigmented veggies for this discoloration, which occasionally may turn the palms of hands and the soles of feet orange when eaten in excess.

Medications that cause the same problem include the antibiotic Rifadin (rifampin), the blood thinner Coumadin (warfarin), a urinary tract discomfort treatment drug Pyridium (phenazopyridine) and some laxatives and chemotherapy.

Lastly, if you don't drink enough fluids your urine color may deepen because urochrome—the substance responsible for pee's yellow tint—becomes concentrated.

Urine blue- or green-tinted?

If you're an asparagus lover, you may notice a greenish tinge to your urine after consuming this veggie. What's more, your pee might smell sulfurous, like rotten cabbage. Some people blame the scent on sulfur-containing fertilizers used on asparagus. Others suggest that people with a certain gene release the odor when their bodies break down the sulfur-containin proteins in the spear-shaped veggies. Another theory is that some people may simply make smellier pee than others after eating this vegetable (or whenever). And while we're on the subject, urinary tract infections can also trigger an offensive-smelling urine, and diabetes causes the frequent passing of sweet-smelling urine.

As for blue-colored urine, this color change isn't likely caused by ingested foods. Instead, it's linked to meds such as antidepressant amitriptyline, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory Indocin (indomethacin), acid reflux drug Tagamet (cimetidine), anti-allergy and anti-nausea med Phenegran (promethazine) and several multivitamins. A dye used in several medications for urinary tract pain, such as Urised and others, may also produce blue urine.

In addition, a condition called familial hypercalcemia—a rare inherited disorder that causes high calcium levels in the body—turns urine blue. It's also known as blue diaper syndrome because kids with the condition have blue-colored pee.

Is your pee dark brown or tea-colored?

If so, this might be caused by eating large amounts of fava beans, aloe or rhubarb. In addition, some meds can turn urine brown: the antimalarial drugs chloroquine and primaquine, the antibiotic metronidazole, UTI med nitrofurantoin, a muscle relaxer called methocarbamol, and laxatives containing cascara or senna. The following medical conditions can also be the culprit:

liver disorders (especially hepatitis and cirrhosis), the hereditary disease tyrosinemia and the kidney disease glomerulonephritis, which interferes with the kidney’s ability to remove excess waste and fluid.

Finally, although cloudy and murky urine doesn’t qualify as a color change, this condition may be caused by a UTI or kidney stones. And if you notice any of the urine color or odor changes described here, especially if you’re not on the meds listed, do yourself a favor. Run don’t walk to visit your doctor.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/urine-colorandodor-foodsandmeds-20206-2572