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China Colon Syndrome

So much of what you'll experience in China is common to our life in the West, that the real differences are jarring. And the lack of clean water is probably the biggest one, because it affects every aspect of your trip.

Assuming you follow the advice carefully – use bottled water for brushing your teeth, don't swallow accidentally in the shower, avoid iced drinks – and take the utmost caution in all you eat, something else will get you, because your food gets washed in that water.

Chinese food is fried, boiled, baked, pickled, simmered in hot oil. But you'll never be served a salad, or have raw carrots to munch. Your vegetables will be cooked, and tasty. But cooking breaks down the cell walls of those veggies, which means you won't be getting your roughage. And after a week of that, it will happen: the "China Colon."

You're not sick, so medicine won't help. If you were staying for a month, things would work themselves out down there, but then you'd have more problems when you did come back home.

Packing fresh vegetables is just not an option, but you might want to bring cereal or granola bars with high fiber (that you're used to eating when home), and have some of it every day. Eat your cooked veggies when you can, because something is better than nothing. Fruits with pulp that you'll see on your breakfast buffet, such as oranges and pineapple, can help too.

It's going to happen to you, but you can be prepared to minimize it.

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