

Kids and Constipation:

A Guide for Parents and Families



What is constipation?

Your child may be constipated if he or she has fewer bowel movements (BMs) than usual or has hard stool (poop) for two or more weeks.

When your child is constipated for a few days, the stool may fill up the intestine and cause it to stretch. The over-stretched bowel does not work as well. The stool may become large and hard to pass. Your child may try to hold their stool because of the pain.

Why do children get constipated?

Children get constipated for many reasons, including

- A change in their daily routines
- Not wanting to use a strange bathroom
- Not wanting to stop playing to go to the bathroom
- Little fiber in the diet
- Little exercise
- Potty training
- Stress
- Illness

What are the symptoms?

- Hard, dry stools that are difficult to pass
- Painful BMs or a stomach ache
- Stain in the underwear (accidents happen because the large amount of stool in the intestine starts to overflow)
- Little appetite or not wanting to eat

Is my baby constipated?

Some babies have several BMs in one day. Other babies have BMs less often. In general, it is normal if your baby has at least one soft stool every other day. Your baby will develop a regular BM routine during potty training (27 to 36 months of age).

Parents sometimes worry if their baby strains or cries during a BM. This is normal. Babies sometimes have to strain because their bodies and nervous systems are still developing. Their large intestines fill up with stool, and then they hold their breath and strain to push.

If your baby is old enough, try adding fruits or juices. Your doctor may give your baby medicine.

Call your doctor right away if your baby is sick with

- vomiting,
- bloody diarrhea,
- fever,
- weight loss, and/or
- does not want to feed.

What is the treatment for my child?

The treatment is diet, exercise, and/or medicine.

- Diet:**
- Have your child eat more fruits, vegetables, and grains every day.
 - Have your child drink lots of water every day. Juices can help, too. Try prune, pear, or apple juice.

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- Exercise:**
- Have your child exercise every day for at least 1 hour, if possible.

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- Medicine:**
- Your doctor may give your child a stool softener or a laxative.
 - Your child may need a “clean out” if there is too much stool in the colon. Your doctor will tell you how to do this if it is needed.

How do I know if the treatment worked?

- Your child should have 1 or 2 soft stools at least every other day.
- Your child should not have to think or worry about going to the bathroom. It should be a routine.
- Be patient. It may take 6 to 12 months for your child to get back to a regular BM routine.

What can I do to help my child?

You should not be stressed out by this. Many very good parents have children with constipation! This is a long-term problem with a long-term solution. You can help in these ways:

- Have your child sit on the toilet for 5 to 10 minutes after every meal and before the evening bath.
- Make sure your child's knees are above the waist on the toilet. If your child's feet do not touch the floor, give them a step stool to put their feet on.
- Don't hurry your child. You may want to give your child a favorite book to read while sitting on the toilet.
- Praise your child for trying!
- Don't punish your child if they have an accident. Remember accidents happen because of the large amount of stool in the intestine. Your child is not being bad.
- Use a chart to track daily BMs, how much water they drank, and the medicines taken. You can use the chart on the next page. Put a sticker on the chart for every BM. **Bring the chart with you to your child's doctor appointments.**

Why do children stain their underwear?

When children have been constipated for a long time, sometimes the stool will leak into their underwear. This is because the rectum (end of the intestine) has been stretched out for a long time, and the child cannot control the leakage.

This is called encopresis. It will get better slowly after months of proper treatment of constipation.

Do not blame or punish your child if this happens. They cannot help it.

If your child has problems with this, talk to the teachers and other staff at your child's school. Tell them that it is important for your child to have privacy when having BMs at school and that your child needs to keep clean clothes at school in case of accidents.

Your child should keep taking Miralax until they go at least one month without having any stains on their underwear.

What can I tell my child about the underwear stains?

Here are things that you can tell your child:

- Don't feel bad about the stains. The stool has been inside you for so long that it has stretched out your intestine. Now it is hard for you to control the BM, and some of the stool leaks out into the underwear.
- The stains will stop if you take the medicine, eat, and drink the right foods and liquids, get plenty of exercise, and take time to try to have BMs after meals.
- You should take the medicine until you go at least one month without having an underwear stain.

You can also tell your child that you will talk with their teacher about letting them go to the bathroom at school. Say that you will make sure the teacher has clean clothes if your child needs them at school.




Warning Signs

Contact the doctor if your child has

- Fever of 100.4° F rectal
- Blood in stool
- Vomiting
- Weight loss
- Does not want to feed

Bowel Movement Chart

Day	How many BMs?	How many cups of water or juice?	How many fruits and vegetables?	How much exercise?	What medicine and how much?	Smiley face for BM (or attempt) GOOD JOB! 
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						
Sunday						