

Constipation In Children

What is constipation?

Constipation is having less or harder bowel movements (stool or poop) than usual.

Passing large or hard bowel movements can be painful. When this happens, some children become afraid to have a bowel movement and they begin to hold it in.

What Causes Constipation in Children?

Constipation can be caused by:

- Not going to the bathroom when they need to go:
 - Reasons a child may not go to the bathroom are:
 - Scared of being alone in the bathroom.
 - Being afraid of the toilet.
 - Not wanting to stop playing to take time to go to the bathroom.
- Not eating enough fiber foods, drinking enough liquids, or getting enough exercise.
- An illness can cause constipation that remains a problem even after the illness goes away.
- Some medications.

Constipation Can Cause

Stool soiling or leaking of stool (encopresis) into the underwear or diaper. Soiling occurs when the rectum fills up with hard stool and soft stool leaks out. You may think this is diarrhea or that your child is not wiping well. The stool that leaks out often has a very bad smell and is loose and runny, or like clay.

It is involuntary... your child does not mean to soil his or her pants. Soiling can occur once a day or many times a day. Often after meals or exercise.

How to we treat constipation?

- **Empty or “clean-out” the large intestine of stool.** Your child’s health care provider will prescribe one or more medications to clean out the bowels and keeps the stools soft.
- **Keep new stool soft.** Miralax (or the generic form, Glycolax) is a safe, non-habit forming medication to keep the stools soft. It is tasteless, colorless and odorless and can be taken with most other medications. Occasional side effects are cramps, bloating and diarrhea.

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Take the stool softener regularly as directed. Call your health care provider before you decrease or stop your child's medication.

- **Train the body to have regular bowel movements at regular times.**

Bowel training helps the body to pass stool regularly. In the beginning your child may need to sit on the toilet for 3-5 minutes 3 times a day. Often times this works best right after a meal or just after getting home from school. Taking a warm bath before toilet time can help relax your child and keep his or her bottom clean.

- **Make sure there is enough fluid and fiber in the diet.** A diet high in fiber helps to keep the stool soft. Foods high in fiber include, oatmeal, fruits, vegetables, whole wheat breads and cereals and pasta. Children should also drink plenty of fluids, such as _____.

- **Praising your child.** There are many ways to reward your child for taking part in bowel training. Sometimes

a sticker chart can be used to mark toilet times, or times that stools were passed on the toilet. You can help them stay motivated by small rewards or spending time with them when they follow the correct routine.

Will my child always be constipated?

It takes 3-6 months to break the constipation cycle. Your child may have occasional constipation after the stool softener is stopped. You can give your child one dose of stool softener for occasional relapses.

Call your health care provider if:

- You have questions after you get home.
- Your child does not pass a large amount of stool after the initial clean-out.
- Your child's bowel movements aren't becoming more regular.
- Your child has soiling accidents while taking a stool softener.
- Your child has too many stools, or the stool is too liquidy.

This handout does not take the place of a discussion with your doctor. Discuss any questions or concerns you may have with your doctor.