
Managing Constipation in Children Over 1 Year of Age

What is a normal bowel movement?

Bowel movements vary from child to child. Your child's stools (also called poop) will usually be brown, but other colors are normal too. Stool colour can change when certain foods are eaten, such as beets or blueberries.

How often your child (he) has a bowel movement may be different from others. It may be normal for him to go few times a day. While others may go once a day or every other day. What is important is that his stools are soft, shaped like a smooth sausage and pass easily.

Is my Child Constipated?

Your child may be constipated if he:

- Has dry, hard stools
- Strains or has pain when he has a bowel movement.
- Has less than 2 bowel movements in a week. However, having less frequent bowel movements alone does not mean he is constipated. If his stools are soft, pain-free and follow his usual pattern, he is not constipated.

Withholding Stool

If your child feels pain when passing a hard stool, he may hold in his stool to avoid the pain. This is a common cause of constipation in young children.

Withholding stool will make his stool larger and more painful. His bowel may become impacted (full of stool). You may notice that his underwear is soiled. This is because runny stool can flow around the impaction.

Very large stools that block the toilet may also mean that his bowel is impacted. If you think your child is withholding stool or has an impacted bowel, take him to his health care provider for treatment.



Steps you can take

If your child has been withholding stool or you think his bowel may be impacted, **do not** follow these steps until his bowel has been cleaned out.

Children who do not have an impacted bowel can follow these steps. If you are unsure, ask your child's health care provider.

The following steps will help relieve your child's constipation and prevent it from happening again. If you find that your child is still constipated after 4 weeks, take him to his health care provider.

Increase fibre and fluids

- Offer foods that are good sources of fibre every day such as whole grains, legumes (cooked beans, peas and lentils), vegetables and fruit. Here are some ideas:
 - Use 100% whole grain breads, rolls, pita or bagels when making toast or sandwiches. Look for the words "whole grain".
 - Choose higher fibre cereals such as bran flakes, wheat biscuits and oatmeal. Do not give wheat bran to children under two as it could change how some nutrients get absorbed.
 - Serve meals made with legumes (cooked beans, peas and lentils) instead of meat more often. You could also try, half the amount of meat you normally would and replace it with beans.
 - Try whole grains such as brown rice, whole wheat pasta, barley and quinoa.
 - Offer vegetable and/or fruit at every meal and snack. Encourage your child to eat the peels when possible.
 - Offer fruit instead of juice.
 - Meal and snack ideas:
 - Bean or lentil casseroles, stews, soups or dahl.
 - Whole wheat pasta with vegetables.
 - Oatmeal or high fibre cereals with fruit.
 - Vegetable pizza on whole wheat crust.

- Whole wheat roti and channa (chick peas).
 - Black bean dip or hummus with whole grain crackers.
 - Berry banana yogurt smoothie.
 - Homemade blueberry bran muffin.
- Gradually add higher fibre foods to your child's diet. This will help prevent gas and stomach pain.
 - As your child eats more fibre rich foods, ensure that he drinks more by regularly offering fluids such as water and a moderate amount of milk (2 to 3 cups a day).
 - Prunes are commonly given to help constipation. Offer one or two fresh or canned prunes with cereal or yogurt each day.

Set up a regular toilet routine

- After meals is a good time to go to the toilet.
- Take enough time on the toilet. Do not rush.

Ensure your child has regular activity

- Children under the age of five should aim for at least 180 minutes (3 hours) of physical activity, spread throughout the day and less than 60 minutes (1 hour) of screen time.
- Children over five years should aim for a total of at least 60 minutes (1 hour) of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day and less than 120 minutes (2 hours) of screen time.

Be aware of times when your child is more likely to become constipated

Your child may become constipated when:

- there is a change in his diet, or he isn't drinking enough fluids
- he has a fever or is vomiting
- there are new or stressful events, such as starting school

- he has a busy schedule
- toilets are not available, or he does not have enough time for a bowel movement
- he is being toilet trained

Special considerations

- Children should get extra fibre from foods only. Fibre supplements or laxatives should only be given if recommended by your child's health care provider.
- Single foods do not usually cause constipation, so you do not have to stop giving your child certain foods. Instead, try to ensure your child's overall diet has enough fibre and fluids to avoid constipation.

Distributed by: