

# Preventing Constipation in Children

---

## What is constipation?

When your child has trouble pooping, he or she has constipation. This is very common among young children.

It is also common in children who have wetting problems. If the rectum is full of hard poop, the bladder may not hold as much urine as normal. The pressure may make your child need to pee more often.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Pain in the belly
- Pain when pooping
- Hard, pebble-like poops
- Very large poops that may clog the toilet
- Pooping only once in 3 to 7 days
- Soiled underwear.

## How can we prevent it?

First, talk to your doctor or nurse. He or she can help you find the methods that work best for your child. It may take time and patience. If one method doesn't work, try another.

## *For children who are toilet trained*

- Eating may help, so arrange toilet time after both breakfast and dinner. Have your child sit on the toilet for 5 to 10 minutes at a time.
- Even if your child doesn't poop, praise your child for sitting.
- If the child's feet don't touch the floor, put a stepstool under the feet. It helps to have the knees a bit higher than the hips.

## *For all children*

- Clean the skin well after each poop. Clean skin is less likely to hurt. When the child has pain, he or she may try to avoid pooping.
- Urge your child to get plenty of playtime exercise. This helps the bowel (gut) work better.
- Give your child lots of water.
- Give your child plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole-grain foods each day.
- Limit dairy to three servings each day. This includes milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream.
- Try adding wheat bran or corn bran to your child's foods. Mix it into cereal, waffles, hamburgers and other foods.
  - **Under age 6:** Give 2 heaping teaspoons each day.
  - **6 and older:** Give 3 heaping teaspoons each day.

*continued*

## How can I help my child if he or she is constipated?

There are several methods that might help. Ask your doctor or nurse which to use, how to use them and when.

- Medicine that prevents constipation is called a **stool softener**.
- Medicine that you insert into the rectum is called a **suppository**. It causes the bowel (gut) to contract, and this pushes out the poop.
- With **digital stimulation**, you gently insert a gloved finger about ½ to 1 inch into the rectum. Use a gentle circular motion for one minute. This may cause your child to poop.
- **Manual evacuation** means removing the poop using a gloved finger.
- An **enema** is a liquid that you insert into the rectum. It may cause your child to poop. **Do not use this before talking to your doctor or nurse.**

### Foods That Help Prevent Constipation

- 100% fruit juice (prune, pear or grape work best)
- Fresh fruits and vegetables (eat them with the skins on)
- Dried fruits
- 100% whole grain, high-fiber cereals
- Plenty of water

## When should I call the clinic?

Call your child's clinic if:

- Your child does not poop for two days.
- You see streaks of blood in the poop.
- Your child has pain in the belly.
- Your child keeps soiling his or her underwear.
- You and your child begin to have battles about using the toilet.

## Questions?

If you have any questions, please call your clinic.