

# Helping your child recover from constipation

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## How often should my child have a bowel movement? What is normal?

Every child is different. Most children have a bowel movement 1 or 2 times a day. Some children may go 2 or 3 days between bowel movements. What matters most is that your child has regular bowel movements that are soft and easy to pass.

## What is constipation?

Constipation means your child has fewer bowel movements (stools, pooh) than usual. The bowel movements may be hard and dry, and difficult or painful to pass. As the stool builds up, your child may get stomach cramps and pain.

Constipation is a common problem that can be treated.

## What are the signs of constipation?

- fewer bowel movements than usual
- hard bowel movements
- bowel movements are difficult to pass or painful
- very large bowel movements
- blood with bowel movements
- soiled underwear
- stomach cramps or pain
- stomach (abdomen or belly) looks swollen
- irritability or unexplained change in behaviour
- poor appetite

## **What causes constipation?**

- not drinking enough water
- not eating enough fibre
- eating large amounts of cheese and milk products
- changes in your child's diet
- holding in or refusing to have bowel movements
- painful bowel movements
- some medications
- feeding or swallowing problems
- excess sweating
- poor muscle tone

## **What are the goals for treating constipation?**

- Empty the bowels. This helps get rid of the pain from constipation.
- Soften bowel movements. Softer stools are easier and less painful to pass.
- Keep your child from soiling his or her underwear.
- Help you and your child cope with any problems you are having because of the constipation.
- Prevent constipation from coming back with a high fibre diet, drinking plenty of fluids and being active.

## **What is a laxative?**

- A laxative is a medication that makes the muscles of the bowel move, helping your child have a bowel movement.
- In the Emergency Department, your child may be given one or more laxatives. You may also be given a prescription to give your child laxatives at home. It is very important that your child takes this medication as directed by the doctor.
- It is not harmful to use laxatives as a first step in treating your child's constipation. To treat severe constipation, some children may need laxatives for up to 6 months or longer.

## How can I help my child have healthy bowel habits?

### 1. Give water and fluids

- Always have water freely available. Have your child drink more water than juice.

### 2. Give foods with fibre

- Give your child foods with fibre each day. Foods that contain fibre include whole grain breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables.

### 3. Encourage activity

- Encourage your child to play and be active. Moving around helps the bowels to work.

### 4. Start a routine

- Help your child start a toilet routine. For example, have your child sit on the toilet 20 to 30 minutes after a meal.
- Teach your child to pay attention when he or she feels it's time to use the toilet. Your child should not ignore this feeling or try to hold in a bowel movement. Explain that regular bowel movements are normal and important for good health.
- If your child has been constipated for a long time, it may take several weeks or months to get into a healthy bowel routine.

## Your child's care in the Emergency Department

Your child has been given these treatments for constipation.

### Laxatives

- PEG 3350
- Dulcolax
- Senokot
- Lactulose

### Lubricants

- Mineral oil
- Lansoyl

### Stool Softener

- Colace

### Enema

- Fleet
- Soap suds

**If your child's continues to have constipation or you have concerns about your child, see your family doctor or bring your child back to the Emergency Department.**

### Other instructions:

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