



Constipation in children

Constipation is when you can't pass solid waste, or stool. Passing stool is also called "having a bowel movement."

It can also be having stools that are hard, dry, and difficult or painful to get out. Constipation is not usually serious.



CAUSES

Here are some reasons for constipation:

- Your child has the flu or some other sickness.
- Your child isn't getting enough water.

- Your child is holding in the bowel movement because they:
 - Doesn't want to feel pain or discomfort because it hurts to pass a hard stool
 - Wants to show they can take control and decide things for themselves
 - Has a bad diaper rash
 - Has a tear in the rectum (the opening where stool comes out)
 - Is being toilet trained

Sometimes a child won't have a bowel movement for many days. They may start getting stains in their underpants. This is called "soiling." It is a sign of a bigger problem.

You can do things to help your child's stool be softer. This makes it easier to pass. Don't give your child a laxative or an enema unless the doctor tells you to. (Laxatives and enemas are medicines for constipation.) Your child doesn't have to pass stool every day.

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TRIAGE QUESTIONS



With constipation, does your child have any of these problems?

- Blood in the stool
- A crack or tear in the rectum (the opening where stool comes out)
- Pain with a bowel movement
- Throwing up

NO **YES** ➡ **SEE DOCTOR**



Is your baby less than 2 weeks old and is he or she not passing stool?

NO **YES** ➡ **SEE DOCTOR**



Has your child:

- Gone for more than 4 days without passing stool?
- Been constipated since he or she was born or for more than 4 weeks?
- Had constipation 3 or more times without the flu or any other sickness?

NO **YES** ➡ **CALL DOCTOR**



Is your child leaking and “soiling” his or her clothes?

NO **YES** ➡ **CALL DOCTOR**



USE SELF-CARE



FOR MORE INFORMATION:
healthychildren.org



SELF-CARE

Give your child lots of water and other things to drink. (This is very important when the weather is hot.)

- Give your child a daily serving of apple, pear, or prune juice.
- To help your baby pass stool, lie the baby on his or her back. Move the baby's legs like he or she is riding a bicycle. Or bend your baby's legs at the knees and hold them up to your baby's chest.
- Giving babies corn syrup to treat their constipation is NOT recommended. If your baby is struggling to have a bowel movement after a few days of drinking more fluids and eating more fiber-rich foods, then it is time to contact their doctor.
- Don't give honey to an infant.
- Try using a foot stool if your child sits on the toilet.

Note: You may have to give your child an over-the-counter medicine. Be sure to check with the doctor first. Some medicines are:

- Mineral oil. (Don't give mineral oil to a child under 6 years old.)
- Glycerin suppositories
- Laxatives like Metamucil®