



## Constipation

Constipation is a common problem for children. Children who are constipated will often hold in their poop and try not to go to the bathroom. Children will tighten their bottoms, cry, scream, hide in corners, cross their legs, shake, get red in the face or dance around to try and hold in their poop. Parents often will confuse these behaviors for trying to pass poop when actually children are trying to hold in the poop.

When your child is having trouble with constipation, he/she may have:

- A decrease in how often he/she poops, may skip days between pooping
- Hard, dry poop
- Trouble pushing poop out of his/her rectum
- Pain with pooping
- Abdominal bloating, cramping or pain
- Small liquid stools or smears of stool in his/her underwear

### Causes of Constipation

Most times, there are no exact reasons why children have trouble with constipation. Your child's health care team might call this, "Functional Constipation." Some things that might add to your child's trouble with constipation are:

- **Diet** --Some children eat too many foods that are high in fat and low in fiber ("Fast Foods" "Junk Foods" and colas). Also, some children do not drink enough water.
- **Lack of Exercise** --Exercise helps move food through the intestines. Children who watch too much TV or play too many video games may not be getting enough exercise.
- **"Busy" Children** -- Some children are too busy playing and forget to go to the bathroom. They ignore their bodies' signals that it is time to go sit and poop.
- **Emotional Issues** -- Sometimes children may feel too much pressure to potty train and will resist potty training. Also children might hold back the urge to poop because they refuse to use public or even school bathrooms.

### Reasons Constipation is a Concern

While it is hard to see your child in pain from constipation, there are other concerns if your child has trouble with constipation for a long time. These concerns include:

- Hard stools and passing large poops can cause a tear in the anus. This tear is called a fissure. Fissures can bleed and be painful.
- Straining to poop can cause blood vessels (hemorrhoids) inside the child's anus to become swollen or inflamed and can cause burning pain and bleeding.
- When a child holds in his/her poop, overtime the poop builds up inside the rectum. This causes the poop to become larger and harder to pass. This can also stretch out the rectum. Runny poop can leak out around this build-up of hard, large poop and cause the child to soil his/her underwear. This soiling is called "encopresis" (in-co-pre-sis). Children may not feel this leakage of poop and are often not able to even smell that they have soiled in their underwear. Children may try to hide their underwear when this happens.

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## Diagnosis of Constipation

During an office visit, a doctor will ask you questions about your child's medical history and complete an exam. The doctor might ask questions like:

- How old was your baby when he/she had their first poop?
- How often does your child poop?
- Does your child complain of pain with pooping?
- Have you been trying to toilet train your child lately?
- What is your child's diet like?
- Has your child had any increased stress lately?
- Does your child soil his/her pants? If so, how often?

Your child may need to have a rectal exam. The doctor or nurse can help explain this special exam to your child before the exam is done.

## Treatment for Constipation

Your health care team will talk with you about your child's specific care plan to treat constipation. This care plan is based on:

- Cause of the constipation, if one is found
- Dietary needs
- Your child's age, overall health and any special care needs
- How long your child has had trouble with constipation
- Your child's ability to tolerate medications, tests or therapies
- How long the treatment might take
- Your feedback on what works best for your child

The outlook for treating children with constipation will depend on if there is type of complex problem causing the constipation. Children with diseases of the intestine may have long-term issue with constipation. Up to 90% of children will have no long-term or recurring problems.



## Encopresis

Children with encopresis, also called soiling, have bowel movements or leak a small amount of stool in their underclothes or on themselves. Soiling is very common, occurring in at least 2 out of 100 children.

### Causes of Encopresis

Soiling is often the result of constipation. Constipation often begins when children hold back, or “with-hold,” their bowel movements. Children will tighten their bottoms, cry, scream, hide in corners, cross their legs, shake, get red in the face or dance around to try and hold in their poop. Parents often will confuse these behaviors for trying to pass poop when actually children are trying to hold in the poop. Some reasons that children start holding bowel movements include:

- Pain before, during or after pooping
- Illnesses
- Hot Weather
- Changes in diet, not drinking enough fluids
- Travel
- Diaper rashes that cause pain when the child has a bowel movement
- Having to use bathrooms that offer less privacy than children are used to using
- Not taking the time out during play or other activities to go to the bathroom when children feel the urge to poop

When children hold in their poop, the lower colon fills up. Over time this can stretch the lower colon out of its normal shape. The more a child holds in poop, the more the colon stretches and the poop gets larger and harder. This makes pooping even more painful. When this happens over and over again, the colon becomes so stretched and floppy that the muscles children use to help push out poop, do not work well. Hard poop can get stuck and only liquid can pass around the hard poop. The stretched nerves become less sensitive and the child does not feel the leaking poop.

Children who have emotional or behavioral issues can have trouble with soiling. There are more serious medical problems that children are born with that can cause encopresis, but these are rare. Your health care team can talk with you more about these causes.



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## About Encopresis

Some children will hold their poop in for many days then pass a very large, hard stool. This poop can be so large that it clogs the toilet but children will also leak liquid poop at the same time. Often parents of children who soil will share that the children use a lot of toilet paper trying to clean themselves. Some children will refuse to poop in the toilet at all.

Other things you can see in children who soil:

- They may hide their soiled underwear or clothes
- Children who have trouble with soiling often cannot feel or even smell that they have soiled
- They may also have trouble with bedwetting or have urine accidents
- Children may get teased causing them not wanting to go to school, to play with friends and this can lead to other problems with behavior

## Treatment of Encopresis

Treatment for soiling will be guided by child's healthcare team with you and your child's input. Treatment includes:

- Cleaning the hard stool out of the lower colon
- Keeping bowel movements soft so the stool will pass easily
- Toilet sitting at least twice a day (if age appropriate)
- Retraining the intestine and rectum to gain control over bowel movements

It is very important that you develop a routine and stick to it. Long term success depends on how well you can follow the care plan. This treatment will take many months of hard work for you and your child. There is no quick fix for this.

Your child's doctor or nurse practitioner will often order medications to help keep your child's bowel movements soft. This will help your child not to hold in their poop and over time will allow the colon to return to its normal shape and function. Please do not give your child stool softeners without the approval of a doctor or nurse practitioner.

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## Tips for Helping your Child with Constipation and/or Encopresis

Constipation is a common problem for many children. Here are some helpful tips for helping your child with constipation.

### How You Can Help

- Give your child his/her medicine.
- Work with your child to find positive ways to reward success.
  - ✓ Stickers
  - ✓ Game board
- Keep track of your child's poop habits, toilet sitting.
- Reward positive behavior quickly and every time.
- Call your nurse:
  - ✓ with your child's progress
  - ✓ when you have questions
  - ✓ if your child has not pooped in 2 days or stools are hard and painful
  - ✓ if your child is soiling his/her underwear
- No matter how old your child is, it is key that you take part in helping your child by:
  - ✓ measuring out medicine doses
  - ✓ watching your child take his/her medicine
  - ✓ reminding your child to sit on the toilet
  - ✓ following through on the reward program
  - ✓ celebrating success



### What Your Child Can Do to Help

- Take medicine.
- Sit on the toilet- at least 2 times per day for 5 minutes. Toilet sitting works best:
  - ✓ when done after meals
  - ✓ when you use a stool under your child's feet if his/her feet don't touch the floor
  - ✓ when you are not in a hurry
- Tell you about his/her poop habits.
- Be in charge of cleaning up his/her poop.
  - ✓ clean his/her own underwear
  - ✓ tell parent if he/she soiled underwear

### What We Can Do to Help

- Be available for your phone calls.
  - ✓ help you adjust medicine doses
  - ✓ answer your questions
  - ✓ work with you and your child to find a positive reward program

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## Managing Constipation and Encopresis: Tools for Success

### How to Give Your Child Positive Feedback

You can see it in his face, his smile, and his eyes. Children respond to praise. Giving your child positive feedback is a key part to help your child manage constipation and/or soiling.

There are many ways to give positive feedback to children of all ages. Here are some tools that you can use:

#### Tool: Sticker Chart

A sticker chart is an easy way to reward your child's positive behaviors. A sticker chart can be as simple as a blank piece of paper that you post on the refrigerator door. You and your child may choose to design the sticker chart or use a calendar page. The chart will be used to place stickers that your child earns for things like:

- sitting on the toilet
- taking medication
- pooping on the potty
- not soiling
- letting you know that he has to go to bathroom

#### Things to keep in mind when using a sticker chart

- be consistent-always give stickers and verbal praise promptly
- focus on the positive, give stickers for positive behaviors
- don't take stickers away once child has earned that sticker
- give verbal praise with each sticker
- set goals-after getting 10-15 stickers provide a reward

#### Rewards ideas

- healthy snacks
- sugar free gum
- special stickers-flashy, cute, sporty
- cool pencils
- trinkets
- alone time with parents
- go to the park
- play catch
- play board game
- art projects



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## Tool: Positive Rewards Game

Cincinnati Children's GI Clinic staff psychologist, Dr. Michael Mellon, has developed a fun, interactive board game. This game allows you and your child to design and choose the rewards in a form of a board game. The basic idea behind the game is that your child moves along the game board by completing his/her bowel management behaviors. As your child moves along the spaces of the game, he/she receives rewards. The goal of the game is to help your child be successful in using the toilet and reduce accidents while having fun.

### Getting started

Things that you might need:

- large paper
- poster board
- markers
- crayons
- stickers
- colored pencils
- glue
- work space
- dedicated time to make the game
- Ask your child what theme he/she wants for the board game. (sports, Candy Land®, Legos®, race track, princesses)
- Design the board game so it will last for one month (about 300 spaces)
- Each space on the board game is worth one point
- Every 20-30 spaces is a special place that should look different than the other spaces (this spot will be a special reward space)
- Make a point system with your child. For example,
  - 1 point for:
    - taking medicine
    - toilet sitting
    - clean day
  - 3 points for:
    - Putting poop in the potty where it belongs

Note: Your child's point system could vary as your child may need to work harder on different areas

- Each point that is earned will be filled in with a sticker on that space
- Praise your child with each point earned
- Every time your child reaches the special rewards space, he/she gets to pick something from a list called the "rewards menu".
  - Prizes on the "rewards menu" should be discussed and chosen with your child before the start of the game, but you have the final say as to what goes on the prize menu. Prizes should be free to low cost. When a child is involved in making the prize list, he/she will be more motivated to earn it.

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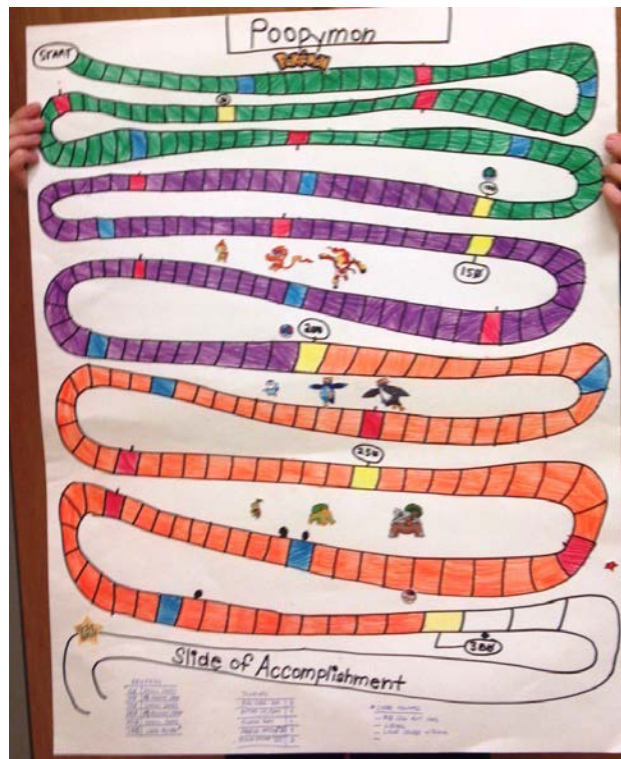
### What is a reward?

A reward is something that you get or an activity you get to do.

- Some ideas include:
  - healthy snacks
  - sugar free gum
  - special stickers-flashy, cute, sporty
  - cool pencils
  - trinkets
  - alone time with parents
  - go to the park
  - play catch
  - play board game
  - art projects

Your child will progress through all the spaces to the finish line at the end of the game. At the end of the game, your child should get a "Grand Prize." This prize, like the prizes on the rewards menu, is discussed and chosen with your child at the beginning of the game. The "Grand Prize" should be a bigger reward but should be affordable for your family. Ideas for the "Grand Prize" might include:

- Allowing your child have a friend visit
- Special night out with family
- Going to a movie
- Letting your child stay up an extra 30 minutes past bedtime



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## High Fiber

Eating foods high in dietary fiber is good for your health. Fiber is naturally found in whole grain foods, fruits, vegetables, and beans/legumes. It can lower your cholesterol and help you have regular bowel function. Fiber can also slow down the rise in blood glucose in people who have diabetes.

### Tips for Increasing Daily Fiber In Your Diet

- Choose whole grain breads, cereals, crackers, rice, and pasta.
  - Look for the word “whole grain” listed first on the ingredient list.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables (with skin).
- Sprinkle high fiber cereal, flax meal or wheat germ on yogurt.
- Add berries to a bowl of cereal.
- Replace juice with a whole piece of fruit.
- Choose dark green leafy vegetables like spinach in place of iceberg lettuce.
- Add beans to salads, soups, tacos, or dips. Slowly increase the amount of fiber you eat each day. Add about 3-5 grams per day to prevent bloating or gas.
- Drink more caffeine-free fluids each day. This will help prevent constipation or stomach pain from increased fiber intake.
- Compare food labels of similar foods to find higher fiber choices.

### Two Different Kinds of Fiber

- **Soluble fiber** has been shown to lower cholesterol and the risk of heart disease. Soluble fiber also helps control blood glucose levels in people with diabetes. Foods high in soluble fiber slow the passage of food through your digestive tract. *Good sources include oats, oat bran, brown rice, barley, beans, seeds, apples and citrus fruits.*
- **Insoluble fiber** promotes regular bowel function and helps prevent constipation by moving food through your digestive tract. It may also help prevent colon cancer. *Good sources include wheat bran, wheat, corn, whole grains, skins of fruits and vegetables and leafy greens.*

### How Much Fiber Do I Need?

- The table below gives you an estimate of the amount of fiber children should eat each day.

Gender/Age	Fiber(grams)/day
1-3 years(Female & Male)	19
4-8 years (Female & Male)	25
9 – 13 years - Female	26
9 – 13 years - Male	31
14-18 years – Female	26
14-18 years – Male	38

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Foods Sources for Fiber

Food	Serving size	Total Fiber(grams)
<b>Grains</b>		
Whole wheat English muffin	1 each	4.4
Whole wheat bread	1 slice	2.0
Whole wheat spaghetti, cooked	½ cup	3.2
Bran cereal	¾ cup	4-9
Brown rice, cooked	½ cup	1.8
Popcorn, air-popped	1 cup	1.2
<b>Vegetables</b>		
Broccoli, cooked(fresh)	½ cup	2.5
Peas cooked (frozen)	½ cup	4.4
Spinach, cooked (frozen)	½ cup	3.5
Sweet Potato with skin	1 medium	3.8
Corn, cooked (canned or frozen)	½ cup	2.1
<b>Fruits</b>		
Pear, raw	1 medium	5.1
Apple with skin, raw	1 medium	3.3
Orange, raw	1 medium	3.1
Banana	1 medium	3.1
<b>Legumes</b>		
Kidney beans, cooked	½ cup	6.9
Lentils, cooked	½ cup	7.8
Pinto beans, cooked	½ cup	7.7

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## Medications for Treatment of Constipation

### Polyethylene glycol (MiraLAX®)

- Other brand names are ClearLax®, Laxaclear®, Smoothlax®
- Softens the poop by pulling water into the stool
- It looks like tiny crystals. It has no taste. It dissolves easily.
- Can mix in drinks like water, juice, sports beverages
- Each capful is 17 grams or 4 teaspoons
- Each capful of MiraLAX is mixed in 8 ounces of the drink or each teaspoon of MiraLAX in 2 ounces of the drink.



### Milk of Magnesia

- ✓ Works by pulling water into the colon causing the colon to squeeze more
- ✓ Comes in many forms such as pills, liquids, chewable tablets
- ✓ Liquid form has a chalky taste. It may taste better mixed with powder flavorings like Nestle Quik®.
- ✓ Works best if you drink a full glass of water after you take the medicine.



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## Medications for Treatment of Constipation

### Lactulose

- ✓ Other brand names are Constulose®, Enulose®, Generlac®, and Kristalose®
- ✓ Softens the poop by pulling water into the stool
- ✓ It has a sweet taste.
- ✓ Comes in liquid or crystal packets
- ✓ Can mix it with juice, milk, water, and infant formula
- ✓ Dissolve crystals in 4 ounces of water or juice.



### Docusate

- ✓ Other brand names are Colace®, Stool Softener®, Kaopectate®, and Docusoft®
- ✓ Softens the poop by pulling water into the stool
- ✓ Comes in pills, liquid, and capsules
- ✓ Liquid has a bitter taste. Mix it with milk, fruit juice, or infant formula to hide the taste.



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## Medications for Treatment of Constipation

### Senna

- ✓ Other brand names are ex-lax®, Fletcher's®, Little Tummys®, Senokot®
- ✓ Increase/stimulates the activity of the bowel
- ✓ Comes in pills, liquids, capsules, chewables, and powder granules
- ✓ Mix the liquid with juice, milk or sweet foods to improve the taste.
- ✓ Give this medicine at bedtime if your child is taking it once a day.



### Mineral oil

- ✓ It is a clear oily liquid.
- ✓ It makes the poop easier to pass.
- ✓ Mix in drinks like juice, water, milk, soft drinks to improve the taste.
- ✓ Should not be used in children under the age of 4, children who have trouble swallowing, or children that have reflux.



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